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THE

LOVELS OF ARDEN

A Novel

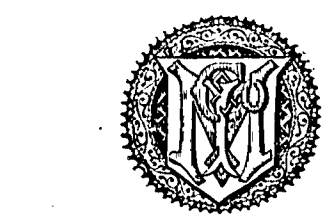
BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



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THE LOVELS OF ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING FATAL.

At seven o'clock Mr. Lovel composed himself for his after-dinner nap, and Clarissa, being free to dispose of herself as she pleased till about nine, at which hour the tea-tray was wont to be brought into the parlour, put on her hat and went out into the village. It would be daylight till nearly eight, and moonlight after that; for the moon rose early, as Miss Lovel remembered. She had a fancy to look at the familiar old place again—the quiet village street, with its three or four primitive shops, and single inn lying back a little from the road, and with a flock of pigeons and other feathered creatures always on the patch of grass before it; the low white-walled cot-

tages, in which there were only friendly faces for her. That suggestion of a foreign home had made her native village newly dear to her.

She had not held much intercourse with these Arden people since her coming home. The sense of her inability to help them in any substantial way had kept her aloof from them. She had not the gift of preaching, or of laying down the laws of domestic economy, whereby she might have made counsel and admonition serve instead of gold or silver. Being able to give them nothing, she felt herself better out of the way; but there were two or three households upon which she had contrived to bestow some small benefits—a little packet of grocery bought with her scanty pocket-money, a jar of good soup that she had coaxed good-natured Martha to make, and so on—and in which her visits had been very welcome.

All was very quiet this evening. Clarissa went through the village without meeting any one she knew. The gate of the churchyard stood open, and Arden churchyard was a favourite spot with Clarissa. A solemn old place, shadowed by funereal yews and spreading cedars, which must have been trees of some importance before the Hanoverian succession. There was a narrow footpath between two rows of tall quaint

old tombstones, with skulls and crossbones cut upon the moss-grown stone; a path leading to another gate, which opened upon a wide patch of heath skirted by a scanty firwood. This was the wildest bit of landscape about Arden, and Clarissa loved it with all an artist's love. She had sketched that belt of fir-trees under almost every condition—with the evening sun behind them, standing blackly out against the warm crimson light; or later, when the day had left no more than a faint opal glimmer in the western sky; later still, in the fair summer moonlight, or on a blusterous autumn afternoon, tossed by the pitiless wind. There was a poetry in the scene that seemed to inspire her pencil, and yet she could never quite satisfy herself. In short, she was not Turner; and that wood and sky needed the pencil of a Turner to translate them fully. This evening she had brought her pocket sketch-book with her. It was the companion of all her lonely walks.

She sat down upon the low boundary-wall of the churchyard, close by the rustic wooden gate through which she had come, facing the heath and the firwood, and took out her sketch-book. There was always something new; inexhaustible Nature had ever some fresh lesson for her. But this evening she sat

idle for a long time, with her pencil in her hand; and when at last she began to draw, it was no feature of heathy ridge or dark firwood, but a man's face, that appeared upon the page.

It was a face that she had drawn very often lately in her idle moods, half unconsciously sometimes—a bold handsome face, that offered none of those difficulties by which some countenances baffle the skill of a painter. It was the face of a man of whom she had told herself it was a sin even to think; but the face haunted her somehow, and it seemed as if her pencil reproduced it in spite of herself.

She was thinking as she drew of Lady Geraldine's postponed wedding. It would have been better that the marriage should have taken place; better that the story should have ended to-day, and that the frail link between herself and George Fairfax should have been broken. That accident of Lord Calderwood's death had made everything more or less uncertain. Would the marriage ever take place? Would George Fairfax, with ample leisure for deliberation, hold himself bound by his promise, and marry a woman to whom he had confessed himself indifferent?

She was brooding over this question when she heard the thud of a horse's hoofs upon the grass,

and, looking up, saw a man riding towards her. He was leaning across his horse's head, looking down at her in the next moment—a dark figure shutting out the waving line of fir-trees and the warm light in the western sky.

'What are you doing there, Miss Lovel?' asked a voice that went straight to her heart. Who shall say that it was deeper or sweeter than common voices? but for her it had a thrilling sound.

She started and dropped her book. George Fairfax dismounted, tied his horse's bridle to the churchyard gate, and picked up the little sketch-book.

'My portrait!' he cried, recognising the carelessly-pencilled head. 'Then you *do* think of me a little, Clarissa! Do you know that I have been prowling about Arden for the last two hours, waiting and watching for you? I have ridden past your father's cottage twenty times, I think, and was on the point of giving up all hope and galloping back to Hale, when I caught sight of a familiar figure from that road yonder.'

He had taken a knife from his pocket, and was deliberately cutting out the leaf from Miss Lovel's sketch-book.

'I shall keep this, Clarissa,—this one blessed

scrap of evidence that you do sometimes think of me.'

'I think of a good many people in the same manner,' she said, smiling, with recovered self-possession. 'I have very few acquaintance whose likenesses I have not attempted in some fashion.'

'But you have attempted mine very often,' he answered, looking over the leaves of the book. 'Yes, here is my profile amongst bits of foliage, and scroll-work, and all the vagabond thoughts of your artistic brain. You shall not snub me, Clarissa. You *do* think of me—not as I think of you, perhaps, by day and night, but enough for my encouragement, almost enough for my happiness. Good heavens, how angry I have been with you during the last few weeks!'

'What right had you to be angry with me, Mr. Fairfax?'

'The sublime right of loving you. To my mind that constitutes a kind of moral ownership. And to see you flirting with that fellow Granger, and yet have to hold my peace! But, thank God, all pretences are done with. I recognise the event of to-day as an interposition of Providence. As soon as I can decently do so, I shall tell Lady Geraldine the truth.'

'You will not break your engagement—at such a time—when she has double need of your love?' cried Clarissa indignantly.

She saw the situation from the woman's point of view, and it was of Geraldine Challoner's feelings she thought at this crisis. George Fairfax weighed nothing in the scale against that sorrowing daughter. And yet she loved him.

'My love she never had, and never can have; nor do I believe that honour compels me to make myself miserable for life. Of course I shall not disturb her in the hour of her grief by any talk about our intended marriage; but, so soon as I can do so with kindness, I shall let her know the real state of my feelings. She is too generous to exact any sacrifice from me.'

'And you will make her miserable for life, perhaps?'

'I am not afraid of that. I tell you, Clarissa, it is not in her cold proud nature to care much for any man. We can invent some story to account for the rupture, which will save her womanly pride. The world can be told that it is she who has broken the engagement: all that will be easily settled. Poor Lord Calderwood! Don't imagine that I am

not heartily sorry for him; he was always a good friend to me; but his death has been most opportune. It has saved me, Clarissa. But for that I should have been a married man this night, a bound slave for evermore. You can never conceive the gloomy dogged spirit in which I was going to my doom. Thank God, the release came; and here, sitting by your side, a free man, I feel how bitter a bondage I have escaped.'

He put his arm round Clarissa, and tried to draw her towards him; but she released herself from him with a quick proud movement, and rose from her seat on the low wall. He rose at the same moment, and they stood facing each other in the darkening twilight.

'And what then, Mr. Fairfax?' she said, trembling a little, but looking him steadily in the face nevertheless. 'When you have behaved like a traitor, and broken your engagement, what then?'

'What then? Is there any possible doubt about what must come then? You will be my wife, Clarissa!'

'You think that I would be an accomplice to such cruelty? You think that I could be so basely ungrateful to Lady Laura, my first friend? Yes,

Mr. Fairfax, the first friend I ever had, except my aunt, whose friendship has always seemed a kind of duty. You think that after all her goodness to me I could have any part in breaking her sister's heart?'

'I think there is one person whose feelings you overlook in this business.'

'And who is that?'

'Myself. You seem to forget that I love you, and that my happiness depends upon you. Are you going to stand upon punctilio, Clarissa, and break my heart because Laura Armstrong has been civil to you?'

Clarissa smiled—a very mournful smile.

'I do not believe you are so dreadfully in earnest,' she said. 'If I did—'

'If you did, what then, Clarissa?'

'It might be different. I might be foolish enough, wicked enough— But I am sure that this folly of yours is no more than a passing fancy. You will go away and forget all about me. You would be very sorry by and by, if I were weak enough to take you at your word; just as sorry as you are now for your engagement to Lady Geraldine. Come, Mr. Fairfax, let us both be sensible, if we can, and let there be an end of this folly for evermore between

us. Good-night; I must go home. It is half-past eight o'clock, and at nine papa has his tea.'

'You shall go home in time to pour out Mr. Lovel's tea; but you shall hear me out first, Clarissa, and you shall confess to me. I will not be kept in the dark.'

And then he urged his cause, passionately, eloquently, or with that which seemed eloquence to the girl of nineteen, who heard him with pale cheeks and fast-throbbing heart, and yet tried to seem unmoved. Plead as he might, he could win no admission from her. It was only in her eyes, which could not look denial, on her tremulous lips, which could not simulate coldness, that he read her secret. There he saw enough to make him happy and triumphant.

'Say what you please, my pitiless one,' he cried at last; 'in less than three months you shall be my wife!'

The church-clock chimed the three-quarters. He had no excuse for keeping her any longer.

'Come then, Clarissa,' he said, drawing her hand through his arm; 'let me see you to your father's door.'

'But your horse—you can't leave him here?'

'Yes, I can. I don't suppose any one will steal him in a quarter of an hour or so; and I daresay we shall meet some village urchin whom I can send to take care of him.'

'There is no occasion. I am quite accustomed to walk about Arden alone.'

'Not at this hour. I have detained you, and am bound to see you safely lodged.'

'But if papa should hear—'

'He shall hear nothing. I'll leave you within a few yards of his gate.'

It was no use for her to protest; so they went back to within half-a-dozen paces of Mill Cottage arm-in-arm; not talking very much, but dangerously happy in each other's company.

'I shall see you again very soon, Clarissa,' George Fairfax said. And then he asked her to tell him her favourite walks; but this she refused to do.

'No matter. I shall find you out in spite of your obstinacy. And remember, child, you owe nothing to Laura Armstrong except the sort of kindness she would show to any pretty girl of good family. You are as necessary to her as the orchids on her dinner-table. I don't deny that she is a warm-hearted little woman, with a great deal that is

good in her—just the sort of woman to dispense a large fortune. But I shall make matters all right in that quarter, and at once.'

They were now as near Mill Cottage as Mr. Fairfax considered it prudent to go. He stopped, released Clarissa's hand from his arm, only to lift it to his lips and kiss it—the tremulous little ungloved hand which had been sketching his profile when he surprised her, half an hour before, on the churchyard wall.

There was not a creature on the road before them, as they stood thus in the moonlight; but in spite of this appearance of security, they were not unobserved. A pair of angry eyes watched them from across a clipped holly hedge in front of the cottage—the eyes of Marmaduke Lovel, who had ventured out in the soft September night to smoke his after-dinner cigar.

'Good-night, Clarissa,' said George Fairfax; 'I shall see you again very soon.'

'No, no; I don't wish to see you. No good can come of our seeing each other.'

'You will see me, whether you wish or not. Good-night. There is nine striking. You will be in time to pour out papa's tea.'

He let go the little hand which he had held till now, and went away. When Clarissa came to the gate, she found it open, and her father standing by it. She drew back with a guilty start.

'Pray come in,' said Mr. Lovel, in his most ceremonious tone. 'I am very glad that a happy accident has enabled me to become familiar with your new habits. Have you learnt to give clandestine meetings to your lovers at Hale Castle? Have I to thank Lady Laura for this novel development of your character?'

'I don't know what you mean, papa. I was sitting in the churchyard just now, sketching, when Mr. Fairfax rode up to me. He stopped talking a little, and then insisted on seeing me home. That is all.'

'That is all. And so it was George Fairfax—the bridegroom that was to have been—who kissed your hand just now, in that loverlike fashion. Pray come indoors; I think this is a business that requires to be discussed between us quietly.'

'Believe me you have no reason to be angry, papa,' pleaded Clarissa; 'nothing could have been farther from my thoughts than the idea of meeting Mr. Fairfax to-night.'

'I have heard that kind of denial before, and know what it is worth,' answered her father coldly. 'And pray, if he did not come here to meet you, may I ask what motive brought Mr. Fairfax to Arden to-night? His proper place would have been at Hale Castle, I should have supposed.'

'I don't know, papa. He may have come to Arden for a ride. Everything is in confusion at the Castle. I scarcely think he would be wanted there.'

'You scarcely think! And you encourage him to follow you here—this man who was to have been married to Lady Geraldine Challoner to-day—and you let him kiss your hand, and part from you with the air of a lover. I am ashamed of you, Clarissa. This business is odious enough in itself to provoke the anger of any father, if there were not circumstances in the past to make it trebly hateful to me.'

They had passed in at the open window by this time, and were standing in the lamp-lit parlour, which had a pretty air of home comfort, with its delicate tea-service and quaintly shaped silver urn. Mr. Lovel sank into his arm-chair with a faint groan, and looking at him in the full light of the lamp, Clarissa saw that he was deadly pale.

'Do you know that the father of that man was my deadliest foe?' he exclaimed.

'How should I know that, papa?'

'How should you know it!—no. But that you should choose that man for your secret lover! One would think there were some hereditary curse upon your mother's race, binding her and hers with that hateful name. I tell you, Clarissa, that if there had been no such creature as Temple Fairfax, my life might have been as bright a one as any man need hope for. I owe every misery of my existence to that man.'

'Did he injure you so deeply, papa?'

'He did me the worst wrong that one man can do to another. He came between me and the woman I loved; he stole your mother's heart from me, Clarissa, and embittered both our lives.'

He stopped, and covered his face with his hand. Clarissa could see that the hand trembled. She had never seen her father so moved before. She too was deeply moved. She drew a chair close to him, and sat down by his side, but dared not speak.

'It is just as well that you should hear the story from me,' he said, after a long pause. 'You may

hear hints and whispers about it from other people by and by perhaps, if you go more into society; for it was known to several. It is best you should know the truth. It is a common story enough in the history of the world; but whenever it happens, it is enough to make the misery of one man's life. I was not always what you have known me, Clarissa,—a worn-out machine, dawdling away the remnant of a wasted existence. I once had hopes and passions like the rest of mankind—perhaps more ardent than the most. Your mother was the loveliest and most fascinating woman I ever met, and from the hour of our first meeting I had but one thought—how I should win her for my wife. It was not a prudent marriage. She was my equal by birth; but she was the daughter of a ruined spendthrift, and had learnt extravagance and recklessness in her very nursery. She thought me much richer than I was, and I did not care to undeceive her. Later, when we were married, and I could see that her extravagant habits were hastening my ruin, I was still too much a moral coward to tell her the naked truth. I could not bear to come between her and caprices that seemed a natural accompaniment to her charms. I was weakness itself in all that concerned her.'

'And she loved you, papa?' said Clarissa softly. 'I am sure she must have loved you.'

'That is a question that I have never answered with any satisfaction to myself. I thought she loved me. She liked me well enough, I believe, till that man crossed her path, and might have learnt to like me better as she grew older and wiser, and rose above the slavery of frivolous pleasures. But, in the most evil hour of her life, she met Temple Fairfax, and from that hour her heart was turned from me. We were travelling, trying to recover from the expenses of a house perpetually full of my wife's set; and it was at Florence that we first encountered the Colonel. He had just returned from India, had been doing great things there, and was considered rather a distinguished person in Florentine society. I need not stop to describe him. His son is like him. He and I became friends, and met almost daily. It was not till a year afterwards that I knew how pitiful a dupe of this man's treachery I had been from the very first. We were still in Italy when I made my first discovery; it was one that let in the light upon *his* character, but did not seriously involve my wife. We fought, and I was wounded. When I recovered, I brought my wife home to Arden. Our year's re-

trenchment had left me poorer than when I left home. Your mother's beauty was a luxury not to be maintained more cheaply at Florence than in Yorkshire.'

There was another pause, and then Marmaduke Lovel went on, in the same bitter tone:

'Within a short time of our return your brother was born. There are things that I cannot even hint to you, Clarissa; but there have been times when the shadow of that man has come between me and my children. Passion has made me unjust. I know that in her worst sin against my love—for I went on loving her to the last—your mother remained what the world calls innocent. But, years after I had believed there was an end of all communion between those two, I discovered letters, even stolen meetings—rare, I confess, and never without witnesses, but no less a treason against me. Colonel Fairfax had friends at Holborough, by whose aid he contrived to see my wife. That he urged her to leave me, I know, and that she was steadfast in her refusal to do me that last wrong. But I know too that she loved him. I have read the confession of that which she called her "madness" under her own hand.'

'O, papa, papa, how sad! how dreadful!'

'Within a year or two of your birth she began to

fade. From my heart I believe it was this struggle between passion and the last remnant of honour that killed her. I need not tell you the details of my discoveries, some of them made not very long before her death. They led to bitter scenes between us; but I thank God I did believe her protestations of innocence, and that I kept her under my own roof. There were others not so merciful. Colonel Fairfax's wife was told of his devotion to mine at Florence, and the duel which ended our acquaintance. She found out something of his subsequent meetings with your mother, and her jealousy brought about a separation. It was managed quietly enough, but not without scandal; and nothing but my determination to maintain my wife's position could have saved her from utter disgrace. Yes, Clarissa, I loved her to the last, but the misery of that last year was something that no words can tell. She died in my arms, and in her latest hour of consciousness thanked me for what she called my generosity. I went straight from her funeral to London, with a bundle of letters in my pocket, to find Temple Fairfax. What might have happened between us, had we met, I can scarcely guess; but there were no scruples on my side. Fortune favoured him, however; he had sailed for India

a few weeks before, in command of his regiment. I had some thoughts of following him even there, but abandoned the notion. My wrongs would keep. I waited for his return, but that never happened. He was killed in Afghanistan, and carried to his Indian grave the reputation of one of the worst men and best soldiers who ever bore the king's commission.'

This was all. To speak of these things had profoundly agitated Marmaduke Lovel; but a sudden impulse had moved this man, who was apt to be so silent about himself and his own feelings, and he had been in a manner constrained to tell this story.

'You can understand now, I suppose, Clarissa,' he said coldly, after another pause, 'why this young man, George Fairfax, is hateful to me.'

'Yes, papa. It is only natural that you should be prejudiced against him. Does he know, do you think—' She faltered and stopped, with a bitter sense of shame.

'Does he know what?'

'About the past?'

'Of course he must know. Do you suppose his mother has not told him her grievances?'

Clarissa remembered Mrs. Fairfax's cold manner, and understood the reason of that tacit avoidance

which had wounded her so deeply. She too, no doubt, was hateful; as hateful to the injured wife of Colonel Fairfax, as his son could be to her father.

'And now, Clarissa,' said Mr. Lovel, 'remember that any acquaintance between you and George Fairfax is most repugnant to me. I have told you this story in order that there may be no possibility of any mistake between us. God only knows what it costs a man to open old wounds as I have opened mine to-night. Only this afternoon you affected a considerable regard for me, which I promised to return to the best of my power. All that is a dead letter if you hold any communion with this man. Choose him for your friend, and renounce me for your father. You cannot have both.'

'He is not my friend, papa; he is nothing to me. Even if there were no such thing as this prejudice on your part, I am not so dishonourable as to forget that Mr. Fairfax is engaged to Lady Geraldine.'

'And you promise that there shall be no more meetings, no repetition of the kind of thing I saw to-night?'

'I promise, papa, that of my own free will I will never see him again. Our meeting to-night was entirely accidental.'

'On your part, perhaps; but was it so on his?'

'I cannot tell that, papa.'

Mr. Lovel felt himself obliged to be satisfied with this answer. It seemed to him a hard thing that the son of his enemy should arise thus to torment him—an accident that might have tempted a superstitious man to think that an evil fate brooded over his house; and Marmaduke Lovel's mind, being by no means strongly influenced by belief, was more or less tainted with superstition. Looked at from any point of view, it was too provoking that this man should cross Clarissa's pathway at the very moment when it was all-important to her destiny that her heart should be untouched, her fancy unfettered.

'If nothing comes of this Granger business I shall take her abroad,' Mr. Lovel said to himself; 'anything to get her out of the way of a Fairfax.'

He drank his tea in silence, meditating upon that little scene in the moonlight, and stealing a look at his daughter every now and then, as she sat opposite to him pretending to read. He could see that the open book was the merest pretence, and that Clarissa was profoundly agitated. Was it her mother's story that had moved her so deeply, or that other newer story which George Fairfax might have been whis-

pering to her just now in the lonely moonlit road? Mr. Lovel was disturbed by this question, but did not care to seek any farther explanation from his daughter. There are some subjects that will not bear discussion.

CHAPTER II.

MR. GRANGER IS PRECIPITATE.

Clarissa had little sleep that night. The image of George Fairfax, and of that dead soldier whom she pictured darkly like him, haunted her all through the slow silent hours. Her mother's story had touched her to the heart; but her sympathies were with her father. Here was a new reason why she should shut her heart against Lady Geraldine's lover, if any reason were wanted to strengthen that sense of honour which reigns supreme in a girl's unsullied soul. In her conviction as to what was right she never wavered. She felt herself very weak where this man was concerned—weak enough to love him in spite of reason and honour; but she did not doubt her power to keep that guilty secret, and to hide her weakness from George Fairfax.

She had almost forgotten her engagement at

Arden Court when her father came down to his late breakfast, and found her sketching at a little table near the window, with the affectionate Ponto nestling close at her side.

'I thought you would be dressing for your visit by this time, Clary,' he said very graciously.

'My visit, papa? O, yes, to the Court,' she replied, with a faint sigh of resignation. 'I had very nearly forgotten all about it. I was to be there between twelve and one, I think. I shall have plenty of time to give you your breakfast. It's not eleven yet.'

'Be sure you dress yourself becomingly. I don't want you to appear at a disadvantage compared with the heiress.'

'I'll put on my prettiest dress, if you like, papa; but I can't wear such silks and laces as Miss Granger wears.'

'You will have such things some day, I daresay, and set them off better than Miss Granger. She is not a bad-looking young woman—good complexion, fine figure, and so on—but as stiff as a poker.'

'I think she is mentally stiff, papa; she is a sort of person I could never get on with. How I wish you were coming with me this morning!'

'I couldn't manage it, Clarissa. The schools and the model villagers would be more than I could stand. But at your age you ought to be interested in that sort of thing; and you really ought to get on with Miss Granger.'

It was half-past twelve when Miss Lovel opened the gate leading into Arden Park—the first time that she had ever opened it; though she had stood so often leaning on that rustic boundary, and gazing into the well-known woodland, with fond sad looks. There was an actual pain at her heart as she entered that unforgotten domain; and she felt angry with Daniel Granger for having forced this visit upon her.

'I suppose he is determined that we shall pay homage to his wealth, and admire his taste, and drink the bitter cup of humiliation to the very dregs. If he had any real delicacy of feeling, he would understand our reluctance to any intimacy with him.'

While she was thinking of Mr. Granger in this unfriendly spirit, a step sounded on the winding path before her, and looking up, she perceived the subject of her thoughts coming quickly towards her. Was there ever such an intrusive man? She blushed rosy red with vexation.

He came to her, with his hat in his hand, looking

very big and stiff and counting-house-like among the flickering shadows of forest trees; not an Arcadian figure by any means, but with a certain formal business-like dignity about him, for all that; not a man to be ridiculed or despised.

'I am glad you have not forgotten your promise to come early, Miss Lovel,' he said, in his strong sonorous voice. 'I was just walking over to the cottage to remind you. Sophia is quite ready to do the honours of her schools. But I shall not let her carry you off till after luncheon; I want to show you my improvements. I had set my heart on your seeing the Court for the first time—since its restoration—under my guidance.'

'Pompous, insufferable *parvenu*,' thought Clarissa, to whom this desire on Mr. Granger's part seemed only an odious eagerness to exhibit his wealth. She little knew how much sentiment there was involved in this wish of Daniel Granger's.

They came into the open part of the park presently, and she was fain to confess, that whatever changes had been made—and the alterations here were not many—had been made with a perfect appreciation of the picturesque. Even the supreme neatness with which the grounds were now kept did

not mar their beauty. Fairy-like young plantations of rare specimens of the coniferous tribe had arisen at every available point of the landscape, wherever there had been barrenness before. Here and there the old timber had been thinned a little, always judiciously. No cockney freaks of fancy disfigured the scene. There were no sham ruins, no artificial waterfalls poorly supplied with water, no Chinese pagodas, or Swiss cottages, or gothic hermitages. At one point of the shrubbery where the gloom of cypress and fir was deepest, they came suddenly on a Grecian temple, whose slender marble columns might have gleamed amidst the sacred groves of Diana; and this was the only indulgence Mr. Granger had allowed to an architect's fancy. Presently, at the end of a wide avenue, a broad alley of turf between double lines of unrivalled beeches, the first glimpse of the Court burst upon Clarissa's sight—unchanged and beautiful. A man must have been a Goth, indeed, who had altered the outward aspect of the place by a hair's breadth.

The house was surrounded by a moat, and there was a massive stone gateway, of older date than the Court itself—though that was old—dividing a small prim garden from the park; this gatehouse was a

noble piece of masonry, of the purest gothic, rich with the mellow tint of age, and almost as perfect as in the days when some wandering companionship of masons gave the last stroke of their chisels to the delicate tracery of window and parapet.

The Court formed three sides of a quadrangle. A dear old place, lovable rather than magnificent, yet with all the grandeur of the middle ages; a place that might have stood a siege perhaps, but had evidently been built for a home. The garden originally belonging to the house was simplicity itself, and covered scarcely an acre. All round the inner border of the moat there ran a broad terrace-walk, divided by a low stone balustrade from a grassy bank that sloped down to the water. The square plot of ground before the house was laid out in quaint old flower-beds, where the roses seemed, to Clarissa at least, to flourish as they flourished nowhere else. The rest of the garden consisted of lawn and flower-beds, with more roses. There were no trees near the house, and the stables and out-offices, which made a massive pile of building, formed a background to the grave old gothic mansion.

Without, at least, Mr. Granger had respected the past. Clarissa felt relieved by this moderation, and

was inclined to think him a little less hateful. So far he had said nothing which could seem to betray a boastful spirit. He had watched her face and listened to her few remarks with a kind of deferential eagerness, as if it had been a matter of vital importance to him that she should approve what he had done. A steward, who had been intrusted with the conduct of alterations and renovations during the absence of his master, could scarcely have appeared more anxious as to the result of his operations.

The great iron gates under the gothic archway stood wide open, just as they had been wont to do in Mr. Lovel's time, and Clarissa and her companion passed into the quiet garden. How well she remembered the neglected air of the place when last she had seen it—the mossgrown walks, the duckweed in the moat, the straggling rose-bushes, everything out of order, from the broken weathercock on one of the gateway towers, to the scraper by the half-glass door in one corner of the quadrangle, which had been used instead of the chief entrance! It seems natural to a man of decayed fortune to shut up his hall-door and sneak in and out of his habitation by some obscure portal.

Now all was changed; a kind of antique prim-

ness, which had no taint of cockney stiffness, pervaded the scene. One might have expected to see Sir Thomas More or Lord Bacon emerge from the massive gothic porch, and stroll with slow step and meditative aspect towards the stone sun-dial that stood in the centre of that square rose-garden. The whole place had an air of doublet and hose. It seemed older to Clarissa than when she had seen it last—older and yet newer, like the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, restored, after a century of decay, to all its original grandeur.

The door under the porch stood open; but there were a couple of men in a sober livery waiting in the hall—footmen who had never been reared in those Yorkshire wilds—men with powdered hair, and the stamp of Grosvenor-square upon them. These flew to open inner doors, and Clarissa began with wonder to behold the new glories of the mansion. She followed Mr. Granger in silence through dining- and billiard-rooms, saloon and picture-gallery, boudoir and music-room, in all of which the Elizabethan air, the solemn grace of a departed age, had been maintained with a marvellous art. Money can do so much; above all where a man has no bigoted belief in his own taste or capacity, and will put his trust

in the intelligence of professional artists. Daniel Granger had done this. He had said to an accomplished architect, 'I give you the house of my choice; make it what it was in its best days. Improve wherever you can, but alter as little as possible; and, above all, no modernising.'

Empowered by this *carte blanche*, the architect had given his soul to dreams of mediæval splendour, and had produced a place which, in its way, was faultless. No matter that some of the carved-oak furniture was fresh from the chisel of the carver, while other things were the spoil of old Belgian churches; that the tapestry in one saloon was as old as the days of its designer, Boucher, and that in the adjoining chamber made on purpose for Arden Court at the Gobelins manufactory of his Imperial Majesty Napoleon III. No matter that the gilt-leather hangings in one room had hung there in the reign of Charles I., while those in another were supplied by a west-end upholsterer. Perfect taste had harmonised every detail; there was not so much as a footstool or a curtain that could have been called an anachronism. Clarissa looked at all these things with a strange sense of wandering somewhere in a dream. It was, and yet was not, her old home. There was nothing

incongruous. The place scarcely seemed new to her, though everything was altered. It was only as it ought to have been always.

She remembered the bare rooms, the scanty shabby furniture of the Georgian era, the patches and glimpses of faded splendour here and there, the Bond-street prettinesses and fripperies in her mother's boudoir, which, even in her early girlhood, had grown tawdry and *rococo*, the old pictures rotting in their tarnished frames; everything with that sordid air of poverty and decay upon it.

'Well, Miss Lovel,' Daniel Granger said at last, when they had gone through all the chief rooms almost in silence, 'do you approve of what has been done?'

'It is beautiful,' Clarissa answered, 'most beautiful; but—but it breaks my heart to see it.'

The words were wrung from her somehow. In the next moment she was ashamed of them—it seemed like the basest envy.

'O, pray, pray do not think me mean or contemptible, Mr. Granger,' she said; 'it is not that I envy you your house, only it was my home so long, and I always felt its neglect so keenly; and to see it now so beautiful, as I could have only pictured it in

my dreams—and even in them I could not fancy it so perfect.'

'It may be your home again, Clarissa, if you care to make it so,' said Mr. Granger, coming very close to her, and with a sudden passion in his voice. 'I little thought when I planned this place that it would one day seem worthless to me without one lovely mistress. It is all yours, Clarissa, if you will have it—and the heart of its master, who never thought that it was in his nature to feel what he feels for you.'

He tried to take her hand; but she shrank away from him, trembling a little, and with a frightened look in her face.

'Mr. Granger, O, pray, pray don't—'

'For God's sake don't tell me that this seems preposterous or hateful to you—that you cannot value the love of a man old enough to be your father. You do not know what it is for a man of my age and my character to love for the first time. I had gone through life heart-whole, Clarissa, till I saw you. Between my wife and me there was never more than liking. She was a good woman, and I respected her, and we got on very well together. That was all. Clarissa, tell me that there is some hope. I ought

not to have spoken so soon; I never meant to be such a fool—but the words came in spite of me. O, my dearest, don't crush me with a point-blank refusal. I know that all this must seem strange to you. Let it pass. Think no more of anything I have said till you know me better—till you find my love is worth having. I believe I fell in love with you that first afternoon in the library at Hale. From that time forth your face haunted me—like some beautiful picture—the loveliest thing I had ever seen, Clarissa!'

'I cannot answer you, Mr. Granger,' she said, in a broken voice; 'you have shocked and surprised me so much, I—'

'Shocked and surprised you! That seems hard.'

In that very moment it flashed upon her that this was what her father and Lady Laura Armstrong had wished to bring about. She was to win back the lost heritage of Arden Court—win it by the sacrifice of every natural feeling of her heart, by the barter of her very self.

How much more Mr. Granger might have said there is no knowing—for, once having spoken, a man is loth to leave such a subject as this unexhausted—but there came to Clarissa's relief the rustling sound

of a stiff silk dress, announcing the advent of Miss Granger, who sailed towards them through a vista of splendid rooms, with a stately uncompromising air that did not argue the warmest possible welcome for her guest.

'I have been hunting for you everywhere, papa,' she said in an aggrieved tone. 'Where have you been hiding Miss Lovel?'

And then she held out her hand and shook hands with Clarissa in the coldest manner in which it was possible for a human being to perform that ceremony. She looked at her father with watchful suspicious eyes as he walked away to one of the windows, not caring that his daughter should see his face just at that moment. There was something, evidently, Sophia thought,—something which it concerned her to discover.

CHAPTER III.

MODEL VILLAGERS.

They went to luncheon in a secondary dining-room —a comfortable apartment, which served pleasantly for all small gatherings, and had that social air so impossible in a stately banqueting-chamber—a perfect gem of a room, hung with gilt leather, relieved here and there by a choice picture in a frame of gold and ebony. Here the draperies were of a dark crimson cut velvet, which the sunshine brightened into ruby. The only ornaments in this room were a pair of matchless Venetian girandoles on the mantelpiece, and a monster Palissy dish, almost as elaborate in design as the shield of Achilles, on the oaken buffet.

The luncheon was not a very genial repast; Miss Granger maintained a polite sulkiness; Clarissa had not yet recovered from the agitation which Mr. Granger's most unexpected avowal had occasioned;

and even the strong man himself felt his nerves shaken, and knew that he was at a disadvantage, between the daughter who suspected him and the woman who had all but refused his hand. He did his utmost to seem at his ease, and to beguile his daughter into a more cordial bearing; but there was a gloom upon that little party of three which was palpably oppressive. It seemed in vain to struggle against the dismal influence. Mr. Granger felt relieved when, just at the close of the meal, his butler announced that Mr. Tillott was in the drawing-room. Mr. Tillott was a mild inoffensive young man of High-church tendencies, the curate of Arden.

'I asked Tillott to go round the schools with us this afternoon,' Mr. Granger said to his daughter in an explanatory tone. 'I know what an interest he takes in the thing, and I thought it would be pleasanter.'

'You are very kind, papa,' Miss Granger replied, with implacable stiffness; 'but I really don't see what we want with Mr. Tillott, or with you either. There's not the least reason that we should take you away from your usual occupations; and you are generally so busy of an afternoon. Miss Lovel and I can see everything there is to be seen, without any

escort; and I have always heard you complain that my schools bored you.'

'Well, perhaps I may have had rather an overdose of the philanthropic business occasionally, my dear,' answered Mr. Granger, with a good-humoured laugh. 'However, I have set my heart upon seeing how all your improvements affect Miss Lovel. She has such a peculiar interest in the place, you see, and is so identified with the people. I thought you'd be pleased to have Tillott. He's really a good fellow, and you and he always seem to have so much to talk about.'

On this they all repaired to the drawing-room, where Mr. Tillott the curate was sitting at a table, turning over the leaves of an illuminated psalter, and looking altogether as if he had just posed himself for a photograph.

To this mild young man Miss Granger was in a manner compelled to relax the austerity of her demeanour. She even smiled in a frosty way as she shook hands with him; but she had no less a sense of the fact that her father had out-manœuvred her, and that this invitation to Mr. Tillott was a crafty design whereby he intended to have Clarissa all to himself during that afternoon.

'I am sorry you could not come to luncheon with us, Tillott,' said Mr. Granger in his hearty way. 'Or are you sure, by the bye, that you have taken luncheon? We can go back to the dining-room and hear the last news of the parish while you wash down some game-pie with a glass or two of the old madeira.'

'Thanks, you are very good; but I never eat meat on Wednesdays or Fridays. I had a hard-boiled egg and some cocoa at half-past seven this morning, and shall take nothing more till sunset. I had duties at Swanwick which detained me till within the last half-hour, or I should have been very happy to have eaten a biscuit with you at your luncheon.'

'Upon my word, Tillott, you are the most indefatigable of men; but I really wish you High-church people had not such a fancy for starving yourselves. So much expenditure of brain-power must involve a waste of the coarser material. Now, Sophy, if you and Miss Lovel are ready, we may as well start.'

They went out into the sunny quadrangle, where the late roses were blooming with all their old luxuriance. How well Clarissa remembered them in those days when they had been the sole glory of the neglected place! In spite of Sophia, who tried her

hardest to prevent the arrangement, Mr. Granger contrived that he and Clarissa should walk side by side, and that Mr. Tillott should completely absorb his daughter. This the curate was no means indisposed to do; for, if the youthful saint had a weakness, it lay in the direction of vanity. He sincerely admired the serious qualities of Miss Granger's mind, and conceived that, blest with such a woman and with the free use of her fortune, he might achieve a rare distinction for his labours in the fold, to say nothing of placing himself on the high-road to a bishopric. Nor was he inclined to think Miss Granger indifferent to his own merits, or that the conquest would be by any means an impossible one. It was a question of time, he thought; the sympathy between them was too strong not to take some higher development. He thought of St. Francis de Sales and Madame de Chantal, and fancied himself intrusted with the full guidance of Miss Granger's superior mind.

They walked across the park to a small gothic gateway, which had been made since the close of Marmaduke Lovel's reign. Just outside this stood the chapel of Mr. Granger's building, and the new schools, also gothic, and with that bran-new aspect

against which architecture can do nothing. They would be picturesque, perhaps, ten years hence. To-day they had the odour of the architect's drawing-board.

Beyond the schools there were some twenty cottages, of the same modern gothic, each habitation more or less borne down and in a manner extinguished by its porch and chimney. If the rooms had been in reasonable proportion to the chimneys, the cottages would have been mansions; but gothic chimeys are pleasing objects, and the general effect was good. These twenty cottages formed the beginning of Mr. Granger's model village—a new Arden, which was to arise on this side of the Court. They were for the most part inhabited by gardeners and labourers more or less dependent on Arden Court, and it had been therefore an easy matter for Miss Granger to obtain a certain deference to her wishes from the tenants.

The inspection of the schools and cottages was rather a tedious business. Sophia would not let her companions off with an iota less than the whole thing. Her model pupils were trotted out and examined in the Scriptures—always in Kings and Chronicles—and evinced a familiarity with the ways of Jezebel

and Rehoboam that made Clarissa blush at the thought of her own ignorance. Then there came an exhibition of plain needlework, excruciatingly suggestive of impaired eyesight; then fancy-work, which Miss Granger contemplated with a doubtful air, as having a frivolous tendency; and then the schoolmistress's parlour and kitchen were shown, and displayed so extreme a neatness that made one wonder where she lived; and then the garden, where the heels of one's boots seemed a profanation; and then, the schools and schoolhouses being exhausted, there came the cottages.

How Clarissa's heart bled for the nice clean motherly women who were put through their paces for Miss Granger's glorification, and were fain to confess that their housekeeping had been all a delusion and a snare till that young lady taught them domestic economy! How she pitied them as the severe Sophia led the way into sacred corners, and lifted the lids of coppers and dustholes, and opened cupboard-doors, and once, with an aspect of horror, detected an actual cobweb lurking in an angle of the whitewashed wall! Clarissa could not admire things too much, in order to do away with some of the bitterness of that microscopic survey. Then there was

such cross-examination about church-going, and the shortcomings of the absent husbands were so ruthlessly dragged into the light of day. The poor wives blushed to own that these unregenerate spirits had still a lurking desire for an occasional social evening at the Coach and Horses, in spite of the charms of a gothic chimney, and a porch that was massive enough for the dungeon of a mediæval fortress. Miss Granger and the curate played into each other's hands, and between the two the model villagers underwent a kind of moral dissection. It was dreary work 'altogether; and Daniel Granger had been guilty of more than one yawn before it was all over, even though he had the new delight of being near Clarissa all the time. It was finished at last. One woman, who in her benighted state had known Miss Lovel, had shown herself touched by the sight of her.

'You never come anigh me now, miss,' she said tenderly, 'though I've knowed you ever since you was a little girl; and it would do my heart good to see your sweet face here once in a way.'

'You've better friends now, you see, Mrs. Rice,' Clarissa answered gently. 'I could do so little for you. But I shall be pleased to look in upon you now and then.'

'Do'ee, now, miss; me and my master will be right down glad to see you. How ever kind new friends may be,' this was said with a conciliatory curtsey to Miss Granger, 'we can't forget old friends. We haven't forgot your goodness when my boy Bill was laid up with the fever, miss, and how you sat beside his bed and read to him.'

It was at this juncture that Sophia espied another cobweb, after which the little party left this the last of the cottages, and walked back to the park, Daniel Granger still by Clarissa's side. He did not make the faintest allusion to that desperate avowal of the morning. He was indeed cruelly ashamed of his precipitation, feeling that he had gone the very way to ruin his cause. All that afternoon, while his daughter had been peering into coppers and washing-tubs and dustholes, he had been meditating upon the absurdity of his conduct, and hating himself for his folly. He was not a man who suffered from a mean opinion of his own merits. On the contrary, in all the ordinary commerce of life he fancied himself more than the equal of the best among his fellow-men. He had never wished himself other than what he was, or mistrusted his own judgment, or doubted that he, Daniel Granger, was a very important atom in the

scheme of creation. But in this case it was different. He knew himself to be a grave middle-aged man, with none of those attributes that might have qualified him to take a young woman's heart by storm; and as surely as he knew this, he also knew himself to be passionately in love. All the happiness of his future life depended on this girl who walked by his side, with her pale calm face and deep hazel eyes. If she should refuse him, all would be finished. He had dreamed his dream, and life could never any more be what it had been for him. The days were past in which he himself had been all-sufficient for his own happiness. But, though he repented that hasty betrayal of his feelings, he did not altogether despair. It is not easy to reduce a man of his age and character to the humble level of a despairing lover. He had so much to bestow, and could not separate himself in his own mind from those rich gifts of fortune which went along with him. No, there was every chance of ultimate success, he thought, in spite of his rashness of that morning. He had only to teach himself patience—to bide his time.

CHAPTER IV.

VERY FAR GONE.

It was a little after six when they came to the gateway of the Court, at which point Mr. Tillott made his adieux. Mr. Granger would have been very glad to ask him to dinner, had he not promised Mr. Lovel that they would be quite alone; so he made up for any apparent inhospitality towards the curate by a hearty invitation for the following Sunday.

There was nearly an hour and a half before dinner; but Sophia carried off her guest to her own rooms at once, for the revision of her toilet, and detained her in those upper regions until just before the ringing of the second bell, very much to the aggravation of Mr. Granger, who paced the long drawing-room in dismal solitude, waiting for Mr. Lovel's arrival.

In her own rooms Miss Granger became a shade more gracious to Clarissa. The exhibition of her

sanctum sanctorum was always pleasing to her. It was the primmest of apartments, half study, half office; and Sophia, one of whose proudest boasts was of her methodical habits, here displayed herself in full force. It seemed as if she had inherited all the commercial faculties of her father, and having no other outlet for this mercantile genius, was fain to expend her gifts upon the petty details of a woman's life. Never had Clarissa seen such a writing-table, with so many pigeon-holes for the classification of documents, and such ranges of drawers with Brahma locks. Miss Granger might have carried on a small banking business with less paraphernalia than she employed in the conduct of her housekeeping and philanthropy.

'I am my own housekeeper,' she told Clarissa triumphantly, 'and know the consumption of this large establishment to an ounce. There is no stint of anything, of course. The diet in the servants' hall is on the most liberal scale, but there is no waste. Every cinder produced in the house is sifted; every candle we burn has been in stock a twelvemonth. I could not pretend to teach my cottagers economy if I did not practise it myself. I rule everything by the doctrine of averages—so much consumed in one

month, so much necessarily required in another; and I reduce everything to figures. Figures cannot deceive, as I tell Mrs. Plumptree, my cook, when she shows me a result that I cannot understand or accept. And there are my books.'

Miss Granger waved her hand towards a row of most uncompromising-looking volumes of the ledger or day-book species. The delight which she displayed in these things was something curious to behold. Every small charity Miss Granger performed, every shortcoming of the recipients thereof, was recorded in those inexorable volumes. She had a book for the record of the church-going, a book for the plain needlework, and was wont to freeze the young blood of her school-children by telling them at the end of the year how many inches of cambric frilling they had hemmed, and how many times they had missed afternoon service. To them she appeared a supernatural creature—a kind of prophetess, sent upon earth for their correction and abasement.

On a solid ecclesiastical-looking oak table in one of the windows Miss Granger had a row of brass-bound money-boxes, inscribed, 'For the Home Mission,' 'For the Extra Curate Society,' and so on—boxes into which Miss Granger's friends and visitors

were expected to drop their mite. Clarissa felt that if she had been laden down with shillings, she could not for her very life have approached those formidable boxes to drop one in under Miss Granger's ken; but, of course, this was a morbid fancy. On another table there were little piles of material for plain work; so prim, so square, so geometrically precise, that Clarissa thought the flannel itself looked cold—a hard, fibrous, cruel fabric, that could never be of use to mortal flesh except as an irritant.

Miss Granger's bed-room and dressing-room were like Miss Granger's morning-room. No frivolous mediævalism here, no dainty upholsterer's work in many-coloured woods, but solid mahogany, relieved by solemn draperies of drab damask, in a style which the wise Sophia called unpretentious. The chief feature in one room was a sewing-machine that looked like a small church organ, and in the other a monster medicine-chest, from the contents of which Miss Granger dealt out doses of her own concoction to her parishioners. Both of these objects she showed to Clarissa with pride, but the medicine-chest was evidently the favourite.

Having improved the time after this manner till twenty minutes past seven, with a very brief interval

devoted to the duties of the toilet, the two young ladies went down to the drawing-room, where the lamps were lighted, and Mr. Lovel just arrived.

That gentleman had the honour of taking Miss Granger in to dinner, and did his utmost to render himself agreeable to her in a quiet undemonstrative way, and to take the gauge of her mental powers. She received his attentions graciously enough—indeed it would not have been easy for any one to be ungracious to Marmaduke Lovel when he cared to please—but he could see very clearly that she suspected the state of affairs, and would be, to the last degree, antagonistic to his own and his daughter's interests. He saw how close a watch she kept upon her father all through the dinner, and how her attention was distracted every now and then when he was talking to Clarissa.

'It is only natural that she should set her face against the business,' he said to himself; 'no woman in her position could be expected to act otherwise; but it strikes me that Granger is not a man likely to be influenced by domestic opposition. He is the kind of man to take his own way, I fancy, in defiance of an opposing universe—a very difficult man to govern. He seems over head and ears in love, however, and

it will be Clarissa's own fault if she doesn't do what she likes with him. Heaven grant she may prove reasonable! Most women would be enchanted with such an opportunity, but with a raw schoolgirl there is no knowing. And that fellow Fairfax's influence may work against us, in spite of her protestations last night.'

This was the gist of Mr. Lovel's disjointed musings during the progress of the dinner; but he took care not to neglect Miss Granger even for a moment, and he gave her very little time to listen to her father's conversation with Clarissa.

The dinner ceremonial was performed in a manner which seemed perfection, even to the fastidious taste of Marmaduke Lovel. There was not the faintest indication of ostentation. Daniel Granger's father had been rich before him; he had been born in the commercial purple, as it were, and none of these things were new to him. Before the Arden-Court days he had occupied a handsome modern country house southward, near Doncaster. He had only expanded his style of living after the purchase of the Court, that was all. He had good taste too, and a keen sense of the incongruous. He did not affect the orchids and frivolous floral decorations, the fra-

gile fairy-like glass, with which Lady Laura Armstrong brightened her dinner-table; but on the other hand, his plate, of which he exhibited no vulgar profusion, was in the highest art, the old Indian china dinner-service scarcely less costly than solid silver, and the heavy diamond-cut glass, with gold emblazonment of crest and monogram, worthy to be exhibited behind the glazed doors of a cabinet. There was no such abomination as gas in the state chambers of Arden Court. Innumerable candles, in antique silver candelabra, gave a subdued brightness to the dining-room. More candles, in sconces against the walls, and two pairs of noble moderator-lamps, on bronze and ormolu pedestals six feet high, lighted the drawing-room. In the halls and corridors there was the same soft glow of lamplight. Only in kitchens and out-offices and stables was the gas permitted to blaze merrily for the illumination of cooks and scullions, grooms and helpers.

Miss Granger only lingered long enough to trifle with a cluster of purple grapes before giving the signal for withdrawal. Her father started up to open the dining-room door, with a little sudden sigh. He had had Clarissa all to himself throughout the dinner, and had been very happy, talking about things that

were commonplace enough in themselves, but finding a perfect contentment in the fact that he was talking to her, that she listened to him and smiled upon him graciously, with a sweet self-possession which put him quite at his ease. She had recovered from that awkward scene of the morning, and had settled in her own mind that the business was rather absurd than serious. She had only to take care that Mr. Granger never had any second opportunity for indulging in such folly.

He held the door open as Clarissa and his daughter went out of the room—held it till that slim girlish figure had vanished at the end of the corridor, and then came back to his seat with another sigh.

'Very far gone,' Mr. Lovel thought, smiling ever so little, as he bent over his claret-glass, pretending to admire the colour of the wine.

It was really wonderful. That vague dream which had grown out of Lady Laura's womanly hints, that pleasant phantom which she had conjured up in Mr. Lovel's mental vision a month or two ago, in the midsummer afternoon, had made itself into a reality so quickly as to astound a man too Horatian in his philosophy to be easily surprised. The fish was such a big one to be caught so easily—without any exercise

of those subtle manœuvres and Machiavellian artifices in which the skilful angler delights—nay, to pounce open-eyed upon the hook, and swallow it bodily!

Mr. Granger filled his glass with such a nervous hand, that half the claret he poured out ran upon the shining oak table. He wiped up the spilt wine clumsily enough, with a muttered denunciation of his own folly, and then made a feeble effort to talk about indifferent things.

It was no use; with every appearance of courtesy and interest Mr. Lovel contrived *not* to help him. One subject after another fell flat: the state of the Conservative party, the probability of a war—there is always a probability of war somewhere, according to after-dinner politicians—the aspect of the country politically and agriculturally, and so on. No, it was no use; Daniel Granger broke down altogether at last, and thought it best to unbosom himself.

'There is something that I think you have a right to know, Mr. Lovel,' he said, in an awkward hesitating way; 'something which I should scarcely like you to learn from your daughter's lips, should she think it worth her while to mention it, before you have heard it from mine. The fact is, in plain English'—he was playing with his dessert-knife as he

spoke, and seemed to be debating within himself whereabouts upon the dining-table he should begin to carve his name—'the fact is, I made an abject fool of myself this morning. I love your daughter—and told her so.'

Mr. Lovel gave a little start, the faintest perceptible movement, expressive of a gentle astonishment.

'I need hardly tell you that you have taken me entirely by surprise,' he said in his quietest tone.

'Of course not. People always are surprised when a man of my age presumes to fall in love with a beautiful girl of eighteen or twenty. If I were to marry some worn-out woman of fashion, some battered widow, steeped to the lips in worldly wisdom, every one would call the match the most suitable thing possible. But if a man of fifty ventures to dream a brighter dream, he is condemned at once for a fool.'

'Pardon me, my dear Granger; I have no idea of looking at things in that light. I only remark that you surprise me, as you no doubt surprised my daughter by any avowal you may have made this morning.'

'Yes; and, I fear, disgusted her still more. I

daresay I did my cause all the harm that it was possible to do it.'

'I must own that you were precipitate,' Mr. Lovel answered, with his quiet smile. He felt as if he had been talking to a schoolboy. In his own words the man was so 'very far gone.'

'I shall know how to be more careful in future, if not wiser; but I suffered myself to be carried away by impulse this morning. It was altogether unworthy of—of my time of life.' This was said rather bitterly. 'Frankly, now, Mr. Lovel: if in the future I were able to gain some hold upon your daughter's affection—without that I would do nothing, no, so help me heaven, however passionately I might love her; if I could—if, in spite of the difference of our ages, I could win her heart—would you be in any way antagonistic to such a marriage?'

'On the contrary, my dear Granger.' Mr. Lovel had already something of the tone of a father-in-law. 'Slight as our actual acquaintance has been, I think I know the estimable qualities of your character well enough from other sources to be able to say that such a marriage would be eminently pleasing to me. Nor is this all. I mean to be perfectly candid with you, Granger. My daughter and myself have both

an almost romantic attachment to this place, and I freely own that it would be very delightful to me to see her mistress of her old home. But, at the same time, I give you my honour that nothing would induce me to govern her choice by the smallest exercise of parental influence. If you can win her, win her, and my best wishes shall go with your wooing; but I will utter no word to persuade her to be your wife.'

'I respect you for that resolution; I think I should have asked you to be neutral, if you hadn't said as much. I couldn't stand the idea of a wife driven into my arms by fatherly coercion. I suppose such things are done in modern society. No, I must win my treasure myself, or not at all. I have everything against me, no doubt, except a rival. There is no fear of *that*, is there, Lovel?'

'Not the slightest. Clarissa is the merest schoolgirl. Her visit to Lady Laura Armstrong was her first glimpse of the world. No, Granger, you have the field all before you. And you strike me as a man not likely to be vanquished by small difficulties.'

'I never yet set myself to do a thing which I didn't accomplish in the long run,' answered Mr. Granger; 'but then I never set myself to win a woman's heart. My wife and I came together easily

enough—in the way of business, as I may say—and liked each other well enough, and I regretted her honestly when she was gone, poor soul! but that was all. I was never "in love" till I knew your daughter; never understood the meaning of the phrase. Of all the accidents that might have happened to me, this is the most surprising to myself. I can never cease to wonder at my own folly.'

'I do not know why you should call it a folly. You are only in the very middle of a man's life; you have a fortune that exempts you from all care and labour, and of course at the same time leaves you more or less without occupation. Your daughter will marry and leave you in a year or two, no doubt. Without some new tie your future existence must needs be very empty.'

'I have felt that; but only since I have loved your daughter.'

This was all. The men came in with coffee, and put an end to all confidential converse; after which Mr. Granger seemed very glad to go back to the drawing-room, where Clarissa was playing a mazurka; while Sophia sat before a great frame, upon which some splendid achievement in Berlin woolwork, that was to be the glory of an approaching charity bazaar,

was rapidly advancing towards completion. The design was a group of dogs, after Landseer, and Miss Granger was putting in the pert black nose of a Skye-terrier as the gentlemen entered. The two ladies were as far apart as they well could be in the spacious room, and had altogether an inharmonious air, Mr. Granger thought; but then he was nervously anxious that these two should become friends.

He went straight to the piano, and seated himself near Clarissa, almost with the air of having a right to take that place.

'Pray, go on playing,' he said; 'that seems very pretty music. I am no judge, and I don't pretend to care for that classical music which every one talks about nowadays, but I know what pleases me.'

The evening was not an especially gay one; but it seemed pleasant enough to Mr. Granger, and he found himself wondering at its brevity. He showed Clarissa some of his favourite pictures. His collection of modern art was a fine one—not large, but very perfect in its way, and he was delighted to see her appreciation of his treasures. Here at least was a point upon which they might sympathise. He had been a good deal worried by Sophia's obtuseness upon all artistic matters.

Mr. Lovel was not very sorry when the fly from the Arden Inn was announced, and it was time to go home. The pictures were fine, no doubt, and the old house was beautiful in its restored splendour; but the whole business jarred upon Marmaduke Lovel's sensitive nerves just a little, in spite of the sudden realisation of that vague dream of his. This place might be his daughter's home, and he return to it: but not as its master. The day of his glory was gone. He was doubtful if he should even care to inhabit that house as his daughter's guest. He had to remind himself of the desperate condition of his own circumstances before he could feel duly grateful to Providence for his daughter's subjugation of Daniel Granger.

He was careful to utter no word about her conquest on the way home, or during the quarter of an hour Clarissa spent with him before going to her room.

'You look pale and tired, my child,' he said, with a sympathetic air, turning over the leaves of a book as he spoke.

'The day was rather fatiguing, papa,' his daughter answered listlessly, 'and Miss Granger is a tiring person. She is so strong-minded, that she makes

one feel weak and helpless by the mere force of contrast.'

'Yes, she is a tiring person, certainly; but I think I had the worst of her at dinner and in the evening.'

'But there was all the time before dinner, papa. She showed us her cottages—O, how I pitied the poor people! though I daresay she is kind to them, in her way; but imagine any one coming in here and opening all our cupboards, and spying out cobwebs, and giving a little shriek at the discovery of a new loaf in our larder. She found out that one of her model cottagers had been eating new bread. She said it gave her quite a revulsion of feeling. And then when we went home she showed me her account-books and her medicine-chest. It was very tiring.'

'Poor child! and this young woman will have Arden Court some day—unless her father should marry again.'

Clarissa's pale face flamed with sudden crimson.

'Which he is pretty sure to do, sooner or later,' continued Mr. Lovel, with an absent meditative air, as of a man who discusses the most indifferent subject possible. 'I hope he may. It would be a pity for such a place to fall into such hands. She would

make it a phalanstery, a nest for Dorcas societies and callow curates.'

'But if she does good with her money, papa, what more could one wish?'

'I don't believe that she would do much good. There is a pinched hard look about the lower part of her face which makes me fancy she is mean. I believe she would hoard her money, and make a great talk and fuss about nothing. Yes, I hope Granger will marry again. The house is very fine, isn't it, since its renovation?'

'It is superb, papa. Dearly as I loved the place, I did not think it could be made so beautiful.'

'Yes, and everything has been done in good taste, too,' Mr. Lovel went on, in rather a querulous tone. 'I did not expect to see that. But of course a man of that kind has only to put himself into the hands of a first-class architect, and if he is lucky enough to select an architect with an artistic mind, the thing is done. All the rest is merely a question of money. Good heavens, what a shabby sordid hole this room looks, after the place we have come from!'

The room was not so bad as to merit that look of angry disgust with which Mr. Lovel surveyed it. Curtains and carpet were something the worse for

wear, the old-fashioned furniture was a little sombre; but the rich binding of the books and a rare old bronze here and there redeemed it from commonness —poor jetsam and flotsam from the wreck of the great house, but enough to give some touch of elegance to meaner things.

'O, papa,' Clarissa cried reproachfully, 'the room is very nice, and we have been peaceful and happy in it. I don't suppose all the splendour of Arden would have made us much happier. Those external things make so little difference.'

She thought of those evenings at Hale Castle, when George Fairfax had abandoned her to pay duty to his betrothed, and of the desolation of spirit that had come upon her in the midst of those brilliant surroundings.

Her father paced the little room as if it had been a den, and answered her philosophic remonstrance with an exclamation of contempt.

'That's rank nonsense, Clarissa—copybook morality, which nobody in his heart ever believes. External things make all the difference—except when a man is writhing in physical pain perhaps. External things make the difference between a king and a beggar. Do you suppose that man Granger is no

happier for the possession of Arden Court—of those pictures of his? Why, every time he looks at a Frith or a Millais he feels a little thrill of triumph, as he says to himself "And that is mine." There is a sensuous delight in beautiful surroundings which will remain to a man whose heart is dead to every other form of pleasure. I suppose that is why the Popes were such patrons of art in days gone by. It was the one legitimate delight left to them. Do you imagine it is no pleasure to dine every night as that man dines? no happiness to feel the sense of security about the future which he feels every morning? Great God, when I think of his position and of mine!'

Never before had he spoken so freely to his daughter; never had he so completely revealed the weakness of his mind.

She was sorry for him, and forbore to utter any of those pious commonplaces by which she might have attempted to bring him to a better frame of mind. She had tact enough to divine that he was best left to himself—left to struggle out of this grovelling state by some effort of his own, rather than to be dragged from the slough of despond by moral violence of hers.

He dismissed her presently with a brief good-night; but lying awake nearly two hours afterwards, she heard him pass her door on the way to his room. He too was wakeful, therefore, and full of care.

CHAPTER V.

TAKING THE PLEDGE.

CLARISSA had a visitor next day. She was clipping and trimming the late roses in the bright autumnal afternoon, when Lady Laura Armstrong's close carriage drove up to the gate, with my lady inside it, in deep mourning. The visit was unexpected, and startled Clarissa a little, with a sensation that was not all pleasure. She could scarcely be otherwise than glad to see so kind a friend; but there were reasons why the advent of any one from Hale Castle should be somewhat painful to her. That meeting with George Fairfax by the churchyard had never been quite out of her mind since it happened. His looks and his words had haunted her perpetually, and now she was inclined to ascribe Lady Laura's coming to some influence of his. She had a guilty feeling, as if she had indeed tried to steal Lady Geraldine's lover.

Lady Laura greeted her with all the old cordiality. There was a relief in that; and Clarissa's face, which had been very pale when she opened the gate to admit her visitor, brightened a little as my lady kissed her.

'My dear child, I am so glad to see you again!' exclaimed Lady Laura. 'I am not supposed to stir outside the Castle in all this dreary week. Poor papa is to be buried to-morrow; but I wanted so much to see you on a most important business; so I ordered the brougham and drove here, with the blinds down all the way; and I'm sure, Clary, you won't think that I feel papa's loss any less because I come to see you just now. But I declare you are looking as pale and wan as any of us at Hale. You have not recovered that dreadful shock yet.'

'It was indeed a dreadful shock, dear Lady Laura,' said Clarissa; and then in a less steady tone she went on: 'Lady Geraldine is better, I hope?'

'Geraldine is what she always is, Clary — a marvel of calmness. And yet I know she feels this affliction very deeply. She was papa's favourite, you know, and had a most extraordinary influence over him. He was so proud of her, poor dear!'

'Won't you come into the house, Lady Laura?'

'By and by, just to pay my respects to your papa. But we'll stay in the garden for the present, please, dear. I have something most particular to say to you.'

Clarissa's heart beat a little quicker. This most particular something was about George Fairfax: she felt very sure of that.

'I am going to be quite candid with you, Clary,' Lady Laura began presently, when they were in a narrow walk sheltered by hazel bushes, the most secluded bit of the garden. 'I shall treat you just as if you were a younger sister of my own. I think I have almost a right to do that; for I'm sure I love you as much as if you were my sister.'

And here Lady Laura's plump little black-gloved hand squeezed Clarissa's tenderly.

'You have been all goodness to me,' the girl answered; 'I can never be too grateful to you.'

'Nonsense, Clary; I will not have that word gratitude spoken between us. I only want you to understand that I am sincerely attached to you, and that I am the last person in the world to hold your happiness lightly. And now, dearest child,

tell me the truth — you have seen George Fairfax since you left Hale?'

Clarissa flushed crimson. To be asked for the truth; as if, under any circumstances, she would have spoken anything less than truth about George Fairfax! And yet that unwonted guilty feeling clung to her, and she was not a little ashamed to confess that she had seen him.

'Yes, Lady Laura.'

'I thought so. I was sure of it. He came here on the very day you left—the day which was to have been his wedding-day.'

'It was on that evening I saw him; but he did not come to this house. I was sitting outside the churchyard sketching when I saw him.'

'He did not come to the house—no; but he came to Arden on purpose to see you,' Lady Laura answered eagerly. 'I am sure of that.'

Unhappily Clarissa could not deny the fact. He had told her only too plainly that he had come to Arden determined to see her.

'Now, Clary, let us be perfectly frank. Before my sister Geraldine came to Hale, I told you that the attachment between her and George Fairfax was one of long standing; that I was sure her happiness

was involved in the matter, and how rejoiced I was at the turn things had taken. I told you all this, Clary; but I did not tell you that in the years we had known him Mr. Fairfax had been wild and unsteady; that, while always more or less devoted to Geraldine, he had had attachments elsewhere—unacknowledged attachments of no very creditable nature; such affairs as one only hears of by a side-wind, as it were. How much Geraldine may have known of this, I cannot tell. I heard the scandals, naturally enough, through Fred; but she may have heard very little. I said nothing of this to you, Clarissa; it was not necessary that I should say anything to depreciate the character of my future brother-in-law, and of a man I really liked.'

'Of course not,' faltered Clarissa.

'Of course not. I was only too happy to find that George had become a reformed person, and that he had declared himself so soon after the change in his fortunes. I was convinced that Geraldine loved him, and that she could only be really happy as his wife. I am convinced of that still; but I know that nothing on earth could induce her to marry him if she had the least doubt of his devotion to herself.'

'I hope that she may never have occasion to

doubt that, Lady Laura,' answered Clarissa. It was really all she could find to say under the circumstances.

'I hope not, and I think not, Clary. He has been attached to my sister so long—he proposed to her in such a deliberate manner—that I can scarcely imagine he would prove really inconstant. But I know that he is a slave to a pretty face, and fatally apt to be ruled by the impulse of the moment. It would be very hard now, Clary, if some transient fancy of that kind were to ruin the happiness of two lives—would it not, my dear?'

'It would be very hard.'

'O, Clarissa, do pray be candid. You *must* understand what I mean. That wretched man has been making love to you?'

'You ought not to ask me such a question, Lady Laura,' answered Clarissa, sorely perplexed by this straight attack. 'You must know that I should respect Lady Geraldine's position—that I should be incapable of forgetting her claims upon Mr. Fairfax. Whatever he may have said to me has been the merest folly. He knows that I consider it in that light, and I have refused ever to see him again if I can possibly help it.'

'That's right, dear!' cried Lady Laura, with a pleased look. 'I knew that you would come out of the business well, in spite of everything. Of course you can care nothing for this foolish fellow; but I know Geraldine's sensitive nature so well, and that if she had the faintest suspicion of George's conduct, the whole thing would be off for ever—an attachment of many years' standing, think of that, Clary! Now I want you to promise me that, come what may, you will give Mr. Fairfax no encouragement. Without encouragement this foolish fancy will die out very quickly. Of course, if it were possible you could care for him, I would not come here to ask you such a thing as this. You would have a right to consider your own happiness before my sister's. But as that is out of the question, and the man is almost a stranger to you—'

'Out of the question—almost a stranger.' Clarissa remembered that night in the railway carriage, and it seemed to her as if she and George Fairfax had never been strangers.

'It is so easy for you to give me this promise. Tell me now, Clary dear, that you will not have anything to say to him, if he should contrive to see you again.'

'I will not, Lady Laura.'

'Is that a promise, now, Clarissa?'

'A most sacred promise.'

Laura Armstrong kissed her young friend in ratification of the compact.

'You are a dear generous-minded girl,' she said, 'and I feel as if I had saved my sister's happiness by this bold course. And now tell me what you have been doing since you left us. Have you seen anything more of the Grangers?'

Questioned thus, Clarissa was fain to give her friend some slight account of her day at Arden.

'It must have affected you very much to see the old place. Ah, Clary, it is you who ought to be mistress there, instead of Miss Granger!'

Clarissa blushed, remembering that awkward avowal of Daniel Granger's.

'I am not fit to be mistress of such a place,' she said. 'I could never manage things as Miss Granger does.'

'Not in that petty way, perhaps. I should not care to see you keeping accounts and prying into grocery-lists as she does. You would govern your house on a grander scale. I should like to see you the owner of a great house.'

'That is a thing you are never likely to see, Lady Laura.'

'I am not so sure of that. I have an idea that there is a great fortune lying at your feet, if you would only stoop to pick it up. But girls are so foolish; they never know what is really for their happiness; and if by any chance there should happen to be some passing folly, some fancy of the moment, to come between them and good fortune, everything is lost.'

She looked at Clarissa closely as she said this. The girl's face had been changing from red to pale throughout the interview. She was very pale now, but quite self-possessed, and had left off blushing. Had she not given her promise—pledged away her freedom of action with regard to George Fairfax—and thus made an end of everything between them? She felt very calm, but she felt as if she had made a sacrifice. As for Daniel Granger, any reference to him and his admiration for her touched upon the regions of the absurd. Nothing—no friendly manœuvring of Lady Laura's, no selfish desires of her father's—could ever induce her to listen for a moment to any proposition from that quarter.

She asked her visitor to go into the house presently, in order to put an end to the conversation; and Lady Laura went in to say a few words to Mr. Lovel. They were very melancholy words—all about the dead and his innumerable virtues—which seemed really at this stage of his history to have been alloyed by no human frailty or shortcoming. Mr. Lovel was sympathetic to the last degree—sighed in unison with his visitor, and brushed some stray drops of moisture from his own eyelids when Lady Laura wept. And then he went out to the carriage with my lady, and saw her drive away, with the blinds discreetly lowered as before.

'What did she come about, Clarissa?' he asked his daughter, while they were going back to the house.

'Only to see me, papa.'

'Only to see you! She must have had something very important to say to you, I should think, or she would scarcely have come at such a time.'

He glanced at his daughter sharply as he said this, but did not question her farther, though he would have liked to do so. He had a shrewd suspicion that this visit of Lady Laura's bore some reference to George Fairfax. Had there been a row

at the Castle? he wondered, and had my lady come to scold her protégée?

'I don't suppose they would show her much mercy if she stood in the way of their schemes,' he said to himself. 'His brother's death makes this young Fairfax a very decent match. The property must be worth five or six thousand a year—five or six thousand. I wonder what Daniel Granger's income is? Nearer fifty thousand than five, if I may believe what I have been told.'

Mr. Granger and his daughter called at Mill Cottage next day; the fair Sophia with a somewhat unwilling aspect, though she was decently civil to Mr. and Miss Lovel. She had protested against the flagrant breach of etiquette in calling on people who had just dined with her, instead of waiting until those diners had discharged their obligation by calling on her; but in vain. Her father had brought her to look at some of Clarissa's sketches, he told his friends.

'I want her to take more interest in landscape art, Mr. Lovel,' he said, 'and I think your daughter's example may inspire her. Miss Lovel seems to me to have a real genius for landscape. I saw some

studies of ferns and underwood that she had done at Hale—full of freedom and of feeling. Sophia doesn't draw badly, but she wants feeling.'

The young lady thus coldly commended gave her head rather a supercilious toss as she replied,

'You must remember that I have higher duties than sketching, papa,' she said; 'I cannot devote *all* my existence to ferns and blackberry-bushes.'

'O, yes, of course; you've your schools, and that kind of thing; but you might give more time to art than you do, especially if you left the management of the house more to Mrs. Plumptree. I think you waste time and energy upon details.'

'I hope I know my duty as mistress of a large establishment, papa, and that I shall never feel the responsibility of administering a large income any less than I do at present. It would be a bad thing for you if I became careless of your interests in order to roam about sketching toadstools and blackberry-bushes.'

Mr. Granger looked as if he were rather doubtful upon this point, but it was evidently wisest not to push the discussion too far.

'Will you be so kind as to show us your portfolio, Miss Lovel?' he asked.

'Of course she will,' answered her father promptly; 'she will only be too happy to exhibit her humble performances to Miss Granger. Bring your drawing-book, Clary.'

Clarissa would have given the world to refuse. A drawing-book is in some measure a silent confidante—almost a journal. She did not know how far her random sketches—some of them mere vagabondage of the pencil, jotted down half unconsciously—might betray the secrets of her inner life to the cold eyes of Miss Granger.

'I'd better bring down my finished drawings, papa; those that were mounted for you at Belforêt,' she said.

'Nonsense, child; Mr. Granger wants to see your rough sketches, not those stiff schoolgirl things, which I suppose were finished by your drawing-master. Bring that book you are always scribbling in. The girl has a kind of passion for art,' said Mr. Lovel, rather fretfully; 'she is seldom without a pencil in her hand. What are you looking for, Clarissa, in that owlish way? There's your book on that table.'

He pointed to the volume—Clarissa's other self and perpetual companion—the very book she had

been sketching in when George Fairfax surprised her by the churchyard wall. There was no help for it, no disobeying that imperious finger of her father's; so she brought the book meekly and laid it open before Sophia Granger.

The father and daughter turned over the leaves together. It was a book of 'bits:' masses of foliage, bramble, and bird's-nest; here the head of an animal, there the profile of a friend; anon a bit of still life; a vase of flowers, with the arabesqued drapery of a curtain for a background; everywhere the evidence of artistic feeling and a practised hand, everywhere a something much above a schoolgirl's art.

Miss Granger looked through the leaves with an icy air. She was obliged to say 'Very pretty,' or 'Very clever,' once in a way; but this cold praise evidently cost her an effort. Not so her father. He was interested in every page, and criticised everything with a real knowledge of what he was talking about, which made Clarissa feel that he was at least no pretender in his love of art; that he was not a man who bought pictures merely because he was rich and picture-buying was the right thing to do.

They came presently to the pages Clarissa had covered at Hale Castle—bits of familiar landscape,

glimpses of still life in the Castle rooms, and lightly-touched portraits of the Castle guests. There was one head that appeared very much oftener than others, and Clarissa felt herself blushing a deeper red every time Mr. Granger paused to contemplate this particular likeness.

He lingered longer over each of these sketches, with rather a puzzled air, and though the execution of these heads was very spirited, he forbore to praise.

'There is one face here that I see a good deal of, Miss Lovel,' he said at last. 'I think it is Mr. Fairfax, is it not?'

Clarissa looked at a profile of George Fairfax dubiously.

'Yes, I believe I meant that for Mr. Fairfax; his is a very easy face to draw, much easier than Lady Geraldine's, though her features are so regular. All my portraits of her are failures.'

'I have only seen one attempt at Lady Geraldine's portrait in this book, Miss Lovel,' said Sophia.

'I have some more on loose sheets of paper, somewhere; and then I generally destroy my failures, if they are quite hopeless.'

'Mr. Fairfax would be quite flattered if he could

see how often you have sketched him,' Sophia continued blandly.

Clarissa thought of the leaf George Fairfax had cut out of her drawing-book; a recollection which did not serve to diminish her embarrassment.

'I daresay Mr. Fairfax is quite vain enough without any flattery of that kind,' said Mr. Lovel. 'And now that you have exhibited your rough sketches, you can bring those mounted drawings, if you like, Clarissa.'

This was a signal for the closing of the book, which Clarissa felt was intended for her relief. She put the volume back upon the little side-table from which she had taken it, and ran upstairs to fetch her landscapes. These Miss Granger surveyed in the same cold tolerant manner with which she had surveyed the sketch-book—the manner of a person who could have done much better in that line herself, if she had cared to do anything so frivolous.

After this Mr. Lovel and his daughter called at the Court; and the acquaintance between the two families being thus formally inaugurated by a dinner and a couple of morning calls, Mr. Granger came very often to the Cottage, unaccompanied by the inflexible Sophia, who began to feel that her father's

infatuation was not to be lessened by any influence of hers, and that she might just as well let him take his own way. It was an odious unexpected turn which events had taken; but there was no help for it. Her confidential maid, Hannah Warman, reminded her of that solemn truth whenever she ventured to touch upon this critical subject.

'If your pa was a young man, miss, or a man that had admired a great many ladies in his time, it would be quite different,' said the astute Warman; 'but never having took notice of any one before, and taking such particular notice of this young lady, makes it clear to any one that's got eyes. Depend upon it, miss, it won't be long before he'll make her an offer; and it isn't likely she'll refuse him—not with a ruined pa to urge her on!'

'I suppose not,' said Sophia disconsolately.

'And after all, miss, he might have made a worse choice. If he were to marry one of those manœuvring middle-aged widows we've met so often out visiting, you'd have had a regular stepmother, that would have taken every bit of power out of your hands, and treated you like a child. But Miss Lovel seems a very nice young lady, and being so near your own age will be quite a companion for you.'

'I don't want such a companion. There is no sympathy between Miss Lovel and me; you ought to know that, Warman. Her tastes are the very reverse of mine, in every way. It's not possible we can ever get on well together; and if papa marries her, I shall feel that he is quite lost to me. Besides, how could I ever have any feeling but contempt for a girl who would marry for money? and of course Miss Lovel could only marry papa for the sake of his money.'

'It's done so often nowadays. And sometimes those matches turn out very well—better than some of the love-matches, I've heard say.'

'It's no use discussing this hateful business, Warman,' Miss Granger answered haughtily. 'Nothing could change my opinion.'

And in this inflexible manner did Daniel Granger's daughter set her face against the woman he had chosen from among all other women for his wife. He felt that it was so, and that there would be a hard battle for him to fight in the future between these two influences; but no silent opposition of his daughter's could weaken his determination to win Clarissa Lovel, if she was to be won by him.

CHAPTER VI.

'HE'S SWEETEST FRIEND, OR HARDEST FOE.'

MR. GRANGER fell into the habit of strolling across his park, and dropping into the garden of Mill Cottage by that little gate across which Clarissa had so often contemplated the groves and shades of her lost home. He would drop in sometimes in the gloaming, and take a cup of tea in the bright lamplit parlour, where Mr. Lovel dawdled away life over Greek plays, Burton's *Anatomy*, and Sir Thomas Browne—a humble apartment, which seemed pleasanter to Mr. Granger, under the dominion of that spell which bound him just now, than the most luxurious of his mediæval chambers. Here he would talk politics with Mr. Lovel, who took a mild interest in the course of public affairs, and whose languid adherence to the Conservative party served to sustain discussion with Daniel Granger, who was a vigorous Liberal.

After tea the visitor generally asked for music; and Clarissa would play her favourite waltzes and mazourkas, while the two gentlemen went on with their conversation. There were not many points of sympathy between the two, perhaps. It is doubtful whether Daniel Granger had ever read a line of a Greek play since his attainment of manhood and independence, though he had been driven along the usual highway of the Classics by expensive tutors, and had a dim remembrance of early drillings in Cæsar and Virgil. Burton he had certainly never looked into, nor any of those other English classics which were the delight of Marmaduke Lovel; so the subject of books was a dead letter between them. But they found enough to talk about somehow, and really seemed to get on very tolerably together. Mr. Granger was bent upon standing well with his poor neighbour; and Mr. Lovel appeared by no means displeased by the rapid growth of this acquaintance, from which he had so obstinately recoiled in the past. He took care, however, not to be demonstrative of his satisfaction, and allowed Mr. Granger to feel that at the best he was admitted to Mill Cottage on sufferance, under protest as it were, and as a concession to his own wishes. Yet Mr. Lovel meant

all this time that his daughter should be mistress of Arden Court, and that his debts should be paid, and his future comfort provided for out of the ample purse of Daniel Granger.

'I shall go and live on the Continent,' he thought, 'when that is all settled. I could not exist as a hanger-on in the house that was once my own. I might find myself a *pied à terre* in Paris or Vienna, and finish life pleasantly enough among some of the friends I liked when I was young. Six or seven hundred a year would be opulence for a man of my habits.'

Little by little Clarissa came to accept those visits of Mr. Granger's as a common part of her daily life; but she had not the faintest notion that she was drifting into a position from which it would be difficult by and by to escape. He paid her no disagreeable attentions; he never alluded to that unfortunate declaration which she remembered with such a sense of its absurdity. It did not seem unreasonable to suppose that he came to Mill Cottage for no keener delight than a quiet chat with Mr. Lovel about the possibility of a coming war, or the chances of a change in the ministry.

Clarissa had been home from Hale nearly six weeks, and she had neither heard nor seen any more of George Fairfax. So far there had been no temptation for the violation of that sacred pledge which she had given to Lady Laura Armstrong. His persistence did not amount to much evidently; his ardour was easily checked; he had sworn that night that she should see him, should listen to him, and six weeks had gone by without his having made the faintest attempt to approach her. It was best, of course, that it should be so—an unqualified blessing for the girl whose determination to be true to herself and her duty was so deeply fixed; and yet she felt a little wounded, a little humiliated, as if she had been tricked by the common phrases of a general wooer—duped into giving something where nothing had been given to her.

'Lady Laura might well talk about his transient folly,' she said to herself. 'It has not lasted very long. She need scarcely have taken the trouble to be uneasy about it.'

There had been one brief note for Clarissa from the mistress of Hale Castle, announcing her departure for Baden with Mr. Armstrong, who was going to shoot capercailzies in the Black Forest. Lady Ger-

aldine, who was very much shaken by her father's death, was to go with them. There was not a word about Mr. Fairfax, and Clarissa had no idea as to his whereabouts. He had gone with the Baden party most likely, she told herself.

It was near the close of October. The days were free from rain or blusterous winds, but dull and gray. The leaves were falling silently in the woods about Arden, and the whole scene wore that aspect of subdued mournfulness which is pleasant enough to the light of heart, but very sad to those who mourn. Clarissa Lovel was not light-hearted. She had discovered of late that there was something wanting in her life. The days were longer and drearier than they used to be. Every day she awoke with a faint sense of expectation that was like an undefined hope; something would come to pass, something would happen to her before the day was done, to quicken the sluggish current of her life; and at nightfall, when the uneventful day had passed in its customary blankness, her heart would grow very heavy. Her father watched her somewhat anxiously at this crisis of her life, and was inwardly disturbed on perceiving her depression.

She went out into the garden alone one evening

after dinner, as it was her wont to do almost every evening, leaving Mr. Lovel dozing luxuriously in his easy-chair by the fire—she went out alone in the chill gray dusk, and paced the familiar walks, between borders in which there were only pale autumnal flowers, chrysanthemums and china asters of faint yellow and fainter purple. Even the garden looked melancholy in this wan light, Clarissa thought. She made the circuit of the small domain, walked up and down the path by the mill-stream two or three times, and then went into the leafless orchard, where the gnarled old trees cast their misshapen shadows on the close-cropped grass. A week-old moon had just risen, pale in the lessening twilight. The landscape had a cold shadowy beauty of its own; but to-night everything seemed wan and cheerless to Clarissa.

She was near the gate leading into Arden Park, when she heard a crackling of withered leaves, the sound of an approaching footstep. It was Mr. Granger, of course. She gave a sigh of resignation. Another evening of the pattern which had grown so familiar to her, that it seemed almost as if Mr. Granger must have been dropping in of an evening all her life. The usual talk of public matters—the

leaders in that day's *Times*, and so on. The usual request for a little music; the usual inquiries about her recent artistic studies. It was as monotonous as the lessons she had learned at Madame Marot's seminary.

'Is my life to go on like that for ever?' she asked herself.

The step came a little nearer. Surely it was lighter and quicker than Daniel Granger's—it had a sharp martial sound; it was like a step she had learned to know very well in the gardens of Hale Castle.

'He is at Baden,' she said to herself.

But the beating of her heart grew faster in spite of that tranquillising assurance. She heard an unaccustomed hand trying the fastening of the gate, then a bolt withdrawn, the sharp light step upon the turf behind her, and in the next moment George Fairfax was by her side, among the weird shadows of the orchard trees.

He tried to draw her towards him, with the air of an accepted lover.

'My darling!' he said, 'I knew I should find you here. I had a fancy that you would be here, waiting for me in the pale moonlight.'

Clarissa laughed—rather an artificial little laugh—but she felt the situation could only be treated lightly. The foolish passionate heart was beating so fast all the time, and the pale face might have told so much, if the light of the new-risen moon had not been dim as yet.

'How long do you suppose I have been waiting at this spot for you, Mr. Fairfax?' she asked lightly. 'For six weeks?'

'Six weeks! Yes, it is six weeks since I saw you. It might be six years, if I were to measure the time by my own impatience. I have been at Nice; Clarissa, almost ever since that night we parted.'

'At Nice! with Lady Laura and Lady Geraldine, I suppose. I thought they were going to Baden.'

'They are at Baden; but I have not been with them. I left England with my mother, who had a very bad attack of her chronic asthma earlier than usual this year, and was ordered off to the South of France, where she is obliged to spend all her winters, poor soul. I went with her, and stayed till she was set up again in some measure. I was really uneasy about her; and it was a good excuse for getting away from Hale.'

Clarissa murmured some conventional expression of sympathy, but that was all.

'My darling,' said George Fairfax, taking her cold hand in his—she tried to withdraw it, but it was powerless in that firm grasp—'My darling, you know why I have come here; and you know now why my coming has been so long delayed. I could not write to you. The Fates are against us, Clarissa, and I do not expect much favour from your father. So I feared that a letter might do us mischief, and put off everything till I could come. I said a few words to Laura Armstrong before I left the Castle—not telling her very much, but giving her a strong hint of the truth. I don't think she'll be surprised by anything I may do; and my letters to Geraldine have all been written to prepare the way for our parting. I know she will be generous; and if my position with regard to her is rather a despicable one, I have done all I could to make the best of it. I have not made things worse by deceit or double-dealing. I should have boldly asked for my freedom before this, but I hear such bad accounts of poor Geraldine, who seems to be dreadfully grieved by her father's loss, that I have put off all idea of any direct explanation for the present. I am not the less resolved, however, Clarissa.'

Miss Lovel turned her face towards him for the first time, and looked at him with a proud steady gaze. She had given her promise, and was not afraid that anything, not even his tenderest, most passionate pleading, could ever tempt her to break it; but she knew more and more that she loved him—that it was his absence and silence which had made her life so blank, that his coming was the event she had waited and watched for day after day.

'Why should you break faith with Lady Geraldine?' she asked calmly.

'Why! Because my bondage has been hateful to me ever since I came to Hale. Because there is only one woman I will have for my wife—and her name is Clarissa Lovel!'

'You had better keep your word, Mr. Fairfax. I was quite in earnest in what I said to you six weeks ago. Nothing in the world would ever induce me to have any part in your breach of faith. Why, even if I loved you—' her voice trembled a little here, and George Fairfax repeated the words after her, '*Even* if you loved me'—'I could never trust you. How could I hope that, after having been so false to her, you could be true to me?'

'I never pretended to love Geraldine Challoner as

I love you; I never professed any passionate devotion. We were friends of long standing, and our marriage seemed a suitable thing; that was all. I swear to you, Clarissa, I never pledged myself to more than that. And it was only when I came to know you that I found myself capable of something more—then only did I discover that I had not wasted the whole of my heart upon the follies of my youth, that I could still love with force and fervour. A glad discovery, my dear one, in spite of the confusion which came with it. Clarissa, for pity's sake be reasonable, and don't let any high-flown notion of duty mislead you in this business. Come what may, I shall never marry Lady Geraldine. All possibility of that is over. Take back those words, Clary, "Even if I loved you." Tell me that you do love me—as I have hoped and dreamed—as I dared to believe sometimes at Hale, when my wedding-day was so near, that I seemed like some wretch bound to the wheel, for whom there is no possibility of escape. That is all over now, darling. To all intents and purposes I am free. Confess that you love me.' This was said half tenderly, half imperiously—with the air of a conqueror accustomed to easy triumphs, an air which this man's experience had made natural to him.

'Come, Clarissa, think how many miles I have travelled for the sake of this one stolen half hour. Don't be so inexorable.'

He looked down at her with a smile on his face, not very much alarmed by her obduracy. It seemed to him only a new form of feminine eccentricity. Here was a woman who actually could resist him for ten minutes at a stretch—him, George Fairfax!

'I am very sorry you should have come so far. I am very sorry you should have taken so much trouble; it is quite wasted.'

'Then you don't like me, Miss Lovel,' still half playfully—the thing was too impossible to be spoken of in any other tone. 'For some reason or other I am obnoxious to you. Look me full in the face, and swear that you don't care a straw for me.'

'I am not going to swear anything so foolish. You are not obnoxious to me. I have no wish to forfeit your friendship; but I will not hear of anything more than friendship from your lips.'

'Why not?'

'For many reasons. In the first place, because there would be treason against Lady Geraldine in my listening to you.'

'Put that delusion out of your mind. There

would be no treason ; all is over between Lady Geraldine and me.'

'There are other reasons, connected with papa.'

'O, your father is against me. Yes, that is only natural. Any more reasons, Clarissa ?'

'One more.'

'What is that ?'

'I cannot tell you.'

'But I insist upon being told.'

She tried her uttermost to avoid answering his questions ; but he was persistent, and she admitted at last that she had promised not to listen to him.

'To whom was the promise given ?'

'That is my secret.'

'To your father ?'

'That is my secret, Mr. Fairfax. You cannot extort it from me. And now I must go back to papa, if you please, or he will be sending some one to look for me.'

'And I shall be discovered in Mr. Capulet's orchard. Ten minutes more, Clarissa, and I vanish amidst the woods of Arden, through which I came like a poacher in order to steal upon you unawares by that little gate. And now, my darling, since we have wasted almost all our time in fencing with words, let

us be reasonable. Promises such as you speak of are pledges given to the winds. They cannot hold an hour against true love. Listen, Clary, listen.'

And then came the pleading of a man only too well accustomed to plead — a man this time very much in earnest: words that seemed to Clarissa full of a strange eloquence, tones that went to her heart of hearts. But she had given her promise, and with her that promise meant something very sacred. She was firm to the last—firm even when those thrilling tones changed from love to anger.

All that he said towards the end she scarcely knew, for there was a dizziness in her brain that confused her, and her chiefest fear was that she should drop fainting at his feet; but the last words of all struck upon her ear with a cruel distinctness, and were never forgotten.

'I am the merest fool and school-boy to take this matter so deeply to heart,' he said, with a scornful laugh, 'when the reason of my rejection is so obvious. What I saw at Hale Castle might have taught me wisdom. Even with my improved prospects I am little better than a pauper compared with Daniel Granger. And I have heard you say that you would give all the world to win back Arden Court. I will

stand aside, and make way for a wealthier suitor. Perhaps we may meet again some day, and I may not be so unfortunate as my father.'

He was gone. Clarissa stood like a statue, with her hands clasped before her face. She heard the gate shut by a violent hand. He was gone in supreme anger, with scorn and insult upon his lips, believing her the basest of the base, the meanest of the mean, she told herself. The full significance of his last words she was unable to understand, but it seemed to her that they veiled a threat.

She was going back to the house slowly, tearless, but with something like despair in her heart, when she heard the orchard gate open again. He had come back, perhaps,—returned to forgive and pity her. No, that was not his footstep; it was Mr. Granger, looking unspeakably ponderous and commonplace in the moonlight, as he came across the shadowy grass towards her.

'I thought I saw a white dress amongst the trees,' he said, holding out his hand to her for the usual greeting. 'How cold your hand is, Miss Lovel! Is it quite prudent of you to be out so late on such a chilly evening, and in that thin dress? I think I must ask your papa to lecture you.'

'Pray don't, Mr. Granger; I am not in the habit of catching cold, and I am used to being in the gardens at all times and seasons. You are late.'

'Yes; I have been at Holborough all day, and dined an hour later than usual. Your papa is quite well, I hope?'

'He is just the same as ever. He is always more or less of an invalid, you know.'

They came in sight of the broad bay window of the parlour at this moment, and the firelight within revealed Mr. Lovel in a very comfortable aspect, fast asleep, with his pale aristocratic-looking face relieved by the crimson cushions of his capacious easy-chair, and the brown setter's head on his knee. There were some books on the table by his side, but it was evident that his studies since dinner had not been profound.

Clarissa and her companion went in at a half-glass door that opened into a small lobby next the parlour. She knew that to open the window at such an hour in the month of October was an unpardonable crime in her father's eyes. They went into the room very softly; but Mr. Lovel, who was a light sleeper, started up at their entrance, and declared with some show of surprise that he must have been indulging in a nap.

'I was reading a German critic on Æschylus,' he said. 'Those Germans are clever, but too much given to paradoxes. Ring the bell for tea, Clary. I didn't think we should see you to-night, Granger; you said you were going to a dinner at Sir Archer Taverham's.'

'I was engaged to dine with Sir Archer; but I wrote him a note this morning, excusing myself upon the plea of gout. I really had a few twinges last night, and I hate dinner-parties.'

'I am glad you have so much wisdom. I don't think any man under a Talleyrand or an Alvanley can make a masculine dinner worth going to; and as for your mixed herds of men and women, every man past thirty knows that kind of thing to be an abomination.'

The rosy-faced parlour-maid brought in the lamp and the tea-tray, and Clarissa sat quietly down to perform her nightly duties. She took her seat in the full light of the lamp, with no evidence of emotion on her face, and poured out the tea, and listened and replied to Mr. Granger's commonplace remarks, just the same as usual, though the sound of another voice was in her ear—the bitter passionate sound of words that had been almost curses.

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CHAPTER VII.

'IT MEANS ARDEN COURT.'

THE time went by, and Daniel Granger pursued his wooing, his tacit undemonstrative courtship, with the quiet persistence of a man who meant to win. He came to Mill Cottage almost every evening throughout the late autumn and early winter months, and Clarissa was fain to endure his presence and to be civil to him. She had no ground for complaint, no opportunity for rebellion. His visits were not made ostensibly on her account, though friends, neighbours, and servants knew very well why he came, and had settled the whole business in their gossiping little coteries. Nor did he take upon himself the airs of a lover. He was biding his time, content to rejoice in the daily presence of the woman he loved; content to wait till custom should have created a tie between them, and till he could claim her for his wife by right

of much patience and fidelity. He had an idea that no woman, pure and true as he believed this woman to be, could shut her heart against an honest man's love, if he were only patient and faithful, single-minded and unselfish in his wooing.

George Fairfax kept his word. From the hour of that bitter parting he made no sign of his existence to Clarissa Lovel. The Armstrongs were still in Germany when December came, and people who had any claim upon Lady Laura's hospitality lamented loudly that there were to be no gaieties at the Castle this year. It was the second Christmas that the family had been absent. Mr. Fairfax was with them at Baden most likely, Clarissa thought; and she tried to hope that it was so.

Christmas came, and Miss Lovel had to assist at Miss Granger's triumphs. That young lady was in full force at this time of year, dealing out blankets of the shaggiest and most uncompromising textures—such coverings as might have suited the requirements of a sturdy Highlander or a stalwart bushranger sleeping in the open air, but seemed scarcely the pleasantest gifts for feeble old women or asthmatic old men—and tickets representative of small donations in kind, such as a quart of split-peas, or a packet of

prepared groats, with here and there the relief of a couple of ounces of tea. Against plums and currants and candied peel Miss Granger set her face, as verging on frivolity. The poor, who are always given to extravagance, would be sure to buy these for themselves: witness the mountain of currants embellished with little barrows of citron and orange-peel, and the moorland of plums adorned with arabesques of Jamaica ginger in the holly-hung chandler's shop at Arden. Split-peas and groats were real benefits, which would endure when the indigestible delights of plum-pudding were over. Happily for the model villagers, Mr. Granger ordered a bullock and a dozen tons of coals to be distributed amongst them, in a large liberal way that was peculiar to him, without consulting his daughter as to the propriety of the proceeding. She was very busy with the beneficent work of providing her special protégées with the ugliest imaginable winter gowns and frocks. Clarissa, who was eager to contribute something to this good work, had wounded her fingers desperately in the manufacture of these implacable fabrics, which set her teeth on edge every time she touched them. Mr. Lovel would not even allow them to be in the room where he sat.

'If you must work at those unspeakably odious garments, Clarissa,' he said, 'for pity's sake do it out of my presence. Great heavens! what cultivator of the Ugly could have invented those loathsome olive-greens, or that revolting mud-colour? evidently a study from the Thames at low water, just above Battersea-bridge. And to think that the poor—to whom nature seems to have given a copyright in warts and wens and boils—should be made still more unattractive by such clothing as that! If you are ever rich, Clarissa, and take to benevolence, think of your landscape before you dress your poor. Give your old women and children scarlet cloaks and gray petticoats, and gratify your men with an orange neckerchief now and then, to make a patch of colour against your russet background.'

There were dinner-parties at Arden Court that winter, to which Mr. Lovel consented to take his daughter, obnoxious as he had declared all such festivities to be to him. He went always as a concession to his host's desires, and took care to let Daniel Granger know that his going was an act of self-sacrifice; but he did go, and he gave his daughter a ten-pound note, as a free-will offering, for the purchase of a couple of new dresses.

Clarissa wondered not a little at the distinction with which her father and herself were treated by every one who met them at Mr. Granger's house. She did not know that a good deal of this attention was given to the future mistress of Arden Court, and that, in the eyes of county people and Holborough gentry alike, she stood in that position. She did not know that her destiny was a settled business in every one's mind except her own: that her aunt Oliver and the Rector, quite as much as her father, looked upon her marriage with Daniel Granger as inevitable. Mr. Lovel had been careful not to alarm his daughter by any hint of his convictions. He was very well satisfied with the progress of affairs. Daniel Granger was too securely caught for there to be any room for fear of change on his part, and Daniel Granger's mode of carrying on the siege seemed to Mr. Lovel an excellent one. Whatever Clarissa's feelings might have been in the beginning, she must needs succumb before such admirable patience, such almost sublime devotion.

Christmas passed, and the new year and all festivities belonging to the season, and a dreary stretch of winter remained, bleak and ungenial, enlivened only by Christmas bills, the chill prelude of another

year of struggle. Towards the end of January, Marmaduke Lovel's health broke down all of a sudden. He was really ill, and very fretful in his illness. Those creditors of his became desperately pressing in their demands; almost every morning's post brought him a lawyer's letter; and, however prostrate he might feel, he was obliged to sit up for an hour or so in the day, resting his feverish head upon his hand, while he wrote diplomatic letters for the temporary pacification of impatient attorneys.

Poor Clarissa had a hard time of it in these days. Her father was a difficult patient, and that ever-present terror of insolvency, and all the pains and perils attendant thereupon, tormented her by day and kept her awake at night. Every ring at the cottage gate set her heart beating, and conjured up the vision of some brutal sheriff's officer, such as she had read of in modern romance. She nursed her father with extreme tenderness. He was not confined to his room for any length of time, but was weak and ill throughout the bleak wintry months, with a racking cough and a touch of low fever, lying prostrate for the greater part of the day on a sofa by the fire, and only brightening a little in the evening when Mr. Granger paid his accustomed visit. Clarissa tended him all

through these melancholy days, when the rain beat against the windows and the dull gray sky looked as if it would never more be illuminated by a gleam of sunshine; tended him with supreme patience, and made heroic efforts to cheer and sustain his spirits, though her own heart was very heavy. And it came to pass that, in these most trying days, Daniel Granger repeated the avowal of his love, not urging his suit with any hazardous impatience, but offering to wait as long as Clarissa pleased for his sentence. And then, in the midst of the girl's distress at the renewal of this embarrassing declaration, her father spoke to her, and told her plainly that she was, in all honour, bound to become Mr. Granger's wife. She had suffered him to devote himself to her, with a devotion rare in a man of his age and character. She had allowed the outer world to take the business for granted. It would be a cruel wrong done to this man, if she were to draw back now and leave him in the lurch.

'Draw back, papa!' she cried with unmitigated surprise and alarm; 'but what have I done to give you or Mr. Granger, or any one else, the slightest justification for supposing I ever thought of him, except as the most commonplace acquaintance?'

'That pretence of unconsciousness is the merest affectation, Clarissa. You must have known why Mr. Granger came here.'

'I thought he came to see you, papa, just like any other acquaintance.'

'Nonsense, child; one man does not dance attendance upon another like that—crying off from important dinner-parties in order to drink tea with his neighbour, and that kind of thing. The case has been clear enough from the beginning, and you must have known how it was—especially as Granger made some declaration to you the first time you went to the Court. He told me what he had done, in a most honourable manner. It is preposterous to pretend, after that, you could mistake his intentions. I have never worried you about the business; it seemed to me wisest and best to let matters take their natural course; and I am the last of men to play the domestic tyrant in order to force a rich husband upon my daughter; but I never for a moment doubted that you understood Mr. Granger's feelings, and were prepared to reward his patience.'

'It can never be, papa,' Clarissa said decisively; 'I would not commit such a sin as to marry a man I could not love. I am grateful to Mr. Granger, of

course, and very sorry that he should think so much more of me than I deserve, but·

'For God's sake don't preach!' cried her father fretfully. 'You won't have him; that's enough. The only road there was to extrication from my difficulties is shut up. The sheriff's officers can come to-morrow. I'll write no more humbugging letters to those attorneys, trying to stave off the crisis. The sooner the crash comes, the better; I can drag out the rest of my existence somehow, in Bruges or Louvain. It is only a question of a year or two, I daresay.'

The dreary sigh with which Mr. Lovel concluded this speech went to Clarissa's heart. It can scarcely be said that she loved him very dearly, but she pitied him very much. To his mind, no doubt, it seemed a hard thing that she should set her face against a change of fortune that would have insured ease and comfort for his declining years. She knew him weighed down by embarrassments which were very real—which had been known to her before Daniel Granger's appearance as a wooer. There was no pretence about the ruin that menaced them; and it was not strange that her father, who had been loath to move beyond the very outskirts of his lost domain,

should shrink with a shuddering dread from exile in a dismal Belgian town.

After that one bitter speech and that one dreary sigh, Mr. Lovel made no overt attempt to influence his daughter's decision. He had a more scientific game to play, and he knew how to play it. Peevish remonstrances might have availed nothing; threats or angry speeches might have provoked a spirit of defiance. Mr. Lovel neither complained nor threatened; he simply collapsed. An air of settled misery fell upon him, an utter hopelessness, that was almost resignation, took possession of him. There was an unwonted gentleness in his manner to his daughter; he endured the miseries of weakness and prostration with unaccustomed patience; meekness pervaded all his words and actions, but it was the meekness of despair. And so—and so—this was how the familiar domestic drama came to be acted once more—the old, old story to be repeated. It was Robin Gray over again. If the cow was not stolen, the sheriff's officers were at the door, and, for lack of a broken arm, Marmaduke Lovel did not want piteous silent arguments. He was weak and ill and despairing, and where threats or jesuitical pleading would have availed little, his silence did much; until at

last, after several weary weeks of indecision, during which Mr. Granger had come and gone every evening without making any allusion to his suit, there came one night when Clarissa fell on her knees by her father's sofa, and told him that she could not endure the sight of his misery any longer, and that she was willing to be Daniel Granger's wife. Marmaduke Lovel put his feeble arms round his daughter's neck, and kissed her as he had never kissed her before; and then burst into tears, with his face hidden upon her shoulder.

'It was time, Clarissa,' he said at last. 'I could not have kept the brokers out another week. Granger has been offering to lend me money ever since he began to suspect my embarrassments, but I could not put myself under an obligation to him while I was uncertain of your intentions: it will be easy to accept his help now; and he has made most liberal proposals with regard to your marriage settlements. Bear witness, Clary, that I never mentioned that till now. I have urged no sordid consideration upon you to bring about this match; although, God knows, it is the thing I desire most in this world.'

'No, no, papa, I know that,' sobbed Clarissa. And then the image of George Fairfax rose before

her, and the memory of those bitter words, 'It means Arden Court.'

What would he think of her when he should come to hear that she was to be Daniel Granger's wife? It would seem a full confirmation of his basest suspicions. He would never know of her unavailing struggles to escape this doom—never guess her motives for making this sacrifice. He would think of her, in all the days to come, only as a woman who sold herself for the sake of a goodly heritage.

Once having given her promise, there was no such thing as drawing back for Clarissa, even had she been so minded. Mr. Lovel told the anxious lover that his fate was favourably decided, warning him at the same time that it would be well to refrain from any hazardous haste, and to maintain as far as possible that laudable patience and reserve which had distinguished his conduct up to this point.

'Clarissa is very young,' said her father; 'and I do not pretend to tell you that she is able to reciprocate, as fully as I might wish, the ardour of your attachment. One could hardly expect that all at once.'

'No, one could hardly expect that,' Mr. Granger echoed with a faint sigh.

'As a man of the world, you would not, I am

sure, my dear Granger, overlook the fact of the very wide difference in your ages, or expect more than is reasonable. Clarissa admires and esteems you, I am sure, and is deeply grateful for a devotion of which she declares herself undeserving. She is not a vain frivolous girl, who thinks a man's best affection only a tribute due to her attractions. And there is a kind of regard which grows up in a girl's heart for a sensible man who loves her, and which I believe with all my soul to be better worth having than the romantic nonsense young people take for the grand passion. I make no profession, you see, my dear Granger, on my daughter's part; but I have no fear but that Clarissa will learn to love you, in good time, as truly as you can desire to be loved.'

'Unless I thought that she had some affection for me, I would never ask her to be my wife,' said Mr. Granger.

'Wouldn't you?' thought Mr. Lovel. 'My poor Granger, you are farther gone than you suppose!'

'You can give me your solemn assurance upon one point, eh, Lovel?' said the master of Arden Court anxiously; 'there is no one else in the case? Your daughter's heart is quite free? It is only a question as to whether I can win it?'

'Her heart is entirely free, and as pure as a child's. She is full of affection, poor girl, only yearning to find an outlet for it. She ought to make you a good wife, Daniel Granger. There is nothing against her doing so.'

'God grant she may!' replied Mr. Granger solemnly; 'God knows how dearly I love her, and what a new thing this love is to me!'

He took heed of his future father-in-law's counsel, and said nothing more about his hopes to Clarissa just yet awhile. It was only by an undefinable change in his manner—a deeper graver tenderness in his tone—that she guessed her father must have told him her decision.

From this day forth all clouds vanished from the domestic sky at Mill Cottage. Mr. Lovel's debts were paid; no more threatening letters made his breakfast-table a terror to him; there were only agreeable-looking stamped documents in receipt of payment, with little apologetic notes, and entreaties for future favours.

Mr. Granger's proposals respecting a settlement were liberal, but, taking into consideration the amount of his wealth, not lavish. He offered to settle a thousand a year upon his wife—five hundred

for her own use as pin-money, five hundred as an annuity for her father. He might as easily have given her three thousand, or six thousand, as it was for no lack of generous inclination that he held his hand; but he did not want to do anything that might seem like buying his wife. Nor did Marmaduke Lovel give the faintest hint of a desire for larger concessions from his future son-in-law: he conducted the business with the lofty air of a man above the consideration of figures. Five hundred a year was not much to get from a man in Granger's position; but added to his annuity of three hundred, it would make eight—a very decent income for a man who had only himself to provide for; and then of course there would be no possibility of his ever wanting money, with such a son-in-law to fall back upon.

Mr. Granger did not lose any time in making his daughter acquainted with the change that was about to befall her. He was quite prepared to find her adverse to his wishes, and quite prepared to defend his choice; and yet, little subject as he was to any kind of mental weakness, he did feel rather uncomfortable when the time came for addressing Miss Granger.

It was after dinner, and the father and daughter were sitting alone in the small gothic dining-room,

sheltered from possible draughts by mediæval screens of stamped leather and brazen scroll-work, and in a glowing atmosphere of mingled fire and lamp light, making a pretty cabinet-picture of home life, which might have pleased a Flemish painter.

'I think, Sophia,' said Mr. Granger,—'I think, my dear, there is no occasion for me to tell you that there is a certain friend and neighbour of yours who is something more to me than the ordinary young ladies of your acquaintance.'

Miss Granger seemed as if she were trying to swallow some hard substance—a knotty little bit of the pine-apple she had just been eating, perhaps—before she replied to this speech of her father's.

'I am sure, papa, I am quite at a loss to comprehend your meaning,' she said at last. 'I have no near neighbour whom I can call my friend, unless you mean Mrs. Patterly, the doctor's wife, who has taken such a warm interest in my clothing-club, and who has such a beautiful mind. But you would hardly call her a young lady.'

'Patterly's wife! no, I should think not!' exclaimed Mr. Granger impatiently; 'I was speaking of Clarissa Lovel.'

Miss Granger drew herself up suddenly, and

pinched her lips together as if they were never to unclose again. She did open them nevertheless, after a pause, to say in an icy tone,

'Miss Lovel is my acquaintance, but not my friend.'

'Why should she not be your friend? She is a very charming girl.'

'O yes, I have no doubt of that, papa, from your point of view; that is to say, she is very pretty, and thinks a great deal of dress, and is quite ready to flirt with any one who likes to flirt with her—I'm sure you must have seen *that* at Hale Castle—and fills her scrap-book with portraits of engaged men: witness all those drawings of Mr. Fairfax. I have no doubt she is just the kind of person gentlemen call charming; but she is no friend of mine, and she never will be.'

'I am sorry to hear that,' said her father sternly; 'for she is very likely to be your stepmother.'

It was a death-blow, but one that Sophia Granger had anticipated for a long time.

'You are going to marry Miss Lovel, papa—a girl two years younger than I am?'

'Yes, I am going to marry Miss Lovel, and I am very proud of her youth and beauty; but I do not

admit her want of more solid charms than those, Sophia. I have watched her conduct as a daughter, and I have a most perfect faith in the goodness and purity of her heart.'

'O, very well, papa. Of course you know what is best for your own happiness. It is not for me to presume to offer an opinion; I trust I have too clear a sense of duty for that.' And here Miss Granger gave a sigh expressive of resignation under circumstances of profound affliction.

'I believe you have, Sophy,' answered her father kindly. 'I believe that, however unwelcome this change may be to you at first—and I suppose it is only natural that it should be unwelcome—you will reconcile your mind to it fully when you discover that it is for my happiness. I am not ashamed to confess to you that I love Clarissa very fondly, and that I look forward to a happy future when she is my wife.'

'I hope, papa, that your life has been not unhappy hitherto—that I have not in any manner failed in my duties as a daughter.'

'O dear, no, child; of course not. That has nothing to do with the question.

'Will it—the marriage—be very soon, papa?'

asked Miss Granger, with another gulp, as if there were still some obstructive substance in her throat.

'I hope so, Sophy. There is no reason, that I can see, why it should not be very soon.'

'And will Mr. Lovel come to live with us?'

'I don't know; I have never contemplated such a possibility. I think Mr. Lovel is scarcely the kind of person who would care to live in another man's house.'

'But this has been his own house, you see, papa, and will seem to belong to him again when his daughter is the mistress of it. I daresay he will look upon us as interlopers.'

'I don't think so, Sophia. Mr. Lovel is a gentleman, and a sensible man into the bargain. He is not likely to have any absurd ideas of that kind.'

'I suppose he is very much pleased at having secured such a rich husband for his daughter,' Miss Granger hazarded presently, with the air of saying something agreeable.

'Sophia!' exclaimed her father angrily, 'I must beg that the question of money may never be mooted in relation to Miss Lovel and myself, by you above all people. I daresay there may be men and women in the world malignant enough to say—mean enough

to suppose—that this dear girl can only consent to marry me because I am a rich man. It is my happiness to know her to be much too noble to yield to any sordid consideration of that kind. It is my happiness to know that her father has done nothing to urge this marriage upon her. She gives herself to me of her own free will, not hurried into a decision by any undue persuasion of mine, and under no pressure from outer circumstances.'

'I am very glad to hear it, papa. I think I should have broken my heart, if I had seen you the dupe of a mercenary woman.'

Mr. Granger got up from his seat with an impatient air, and began to pace the room. His daughter had said very little, but that little had been beyond measure irritating to him. It galled him to think that this marriage should seem to her an astonishing—perhaps even a preposterous—thing. True that the woman he was going to marry was younger, by a year or two, than his own daughter. In his own mind there was so little sense of age, that he could scarcely understand why the union should seem discordant. He was not quite fifty, an age which he had heard men call the very meridian of life; and he felt himself younger now than he

had ever been since he first assumed the cares of manhood—first grew grave with the responsibilities involved in the disposal of a great fortune. Was not this newly-born love, this sudden awakening of a heart that had slumbered so long, a renewal of youth? Mr. Granger glanced at his own reflection in a glass over a buffet, as he paced to and fro. The figure that he saw there bore no sign of age. It was a relief to him to discover that—a thing he had never thought of till that moment.

'Why should she not love me?' he asked himself. 'Are youth and a handsome face the only high-road to a woman's heart? I can't believe it. Surely constancy and devotion must count for something. Is there another man in the world who would love her as well as I? who could say, at fifty years of age, This is my first love?'

'I am to give up the housekeeping, of course, papa, when you are married,' Miss Granger said presently, with that subdued air of resignation in which she had wrapped herself as in a garment since her father's announcement.

'Give up the housekeeping!' he echoed, a little impatiently; 'I don't see the necessity for that. Clarissa'—O, how sweet it was to him to pronounce

her name, and with that delicious sense of proprietorship!—'Clarissa is too young to care much for that sort of thing—dealing out groceries, and keeping account-books, as you do. Very meritorious, I am sure, my dear, and no doubt useful. No, I don't suppose you'll be interfered with, Sophy. In all essentials you will still be mistress. If Clarissa is queen, you will be prime minister; and you know it is the minister who really pulls the strings. And I do hope that in time you two will get to love each other.'

'I shall endeavour to do my duty, papa,' Miss Granger answered primly. 'We cannot command our feelings.'

It was some feeble relief to her to learn that her grocery-books, her day-books by double-entry, and all those other commercial volumes dear to her heart, were not to be taken away from her; that she was still to retain the petty powers she had held as the sole daughter of Daniel Granger's house and heart. But to resign her place at the head of her father's table, to see Clarissa courted and caressed, to find faltering allegiance perhaps even among her model poor—all these things would be very bitter, and in her heart Sophia Granger was angry with her father

for a line of conduct which she considered the last stage of folly. She loved him, after her own precise well-regulated fashion—loved him as well as a creature so self-conscious could be expected to love; but she could not easily forgive him for an act which seemed, in some sort, a fraud upon herself. She had been brought up to believe herself his sole heiress, to look upon his second marriage as an utter impossibility. How often had she heard him ridicule the notion when it was suggested to him by some jocose acquaintance! and it did seem a very hard thing that she should be pushed all at once from this lofty stand-point, and levelled to the very dust. There would be a new family, of course; a brood of sons and daughters to divide her heritage. Hannah Warman had suggested as much when discussing the probability of the marriage, with that friendly candour, and disposition to look at the darker side of the picture, which are apt to distinguish confidantes of her class.

'I am sure, papa,' Miss Granger whimpered by and by, not quite able to refrain from some expression of ill-temper, 'I have scarcely had a pleasant evening since you have known the Lovels. You are always there, and it is very dull to be alone every night.'

'It has been your own fault in some measure, Sophy. You might have had Clarissa here, if you'd chosen to cultivate her friendship.'

'Our inclinations are beyond our control, papa. Nothing but your express commands, and a sense of duty, would induce me to select Miss Lovel for a companion. There is no sympathy between us.'

'Why should there not be? You cannot think her unamiable, nor question her being highly accomplished.'

'But it is not a question of playing, or singing, or painting, or talking foreign languages, papa. One selects a friend for higher qualities than those. There is Mary Anne Patterly, for instance, who can scarcely play the bass in a set of quadrilles, but whose admirable gifts and Christian character have endeared her to me. Miss Lovel is so frivolous. See how stupid and listless she seemed that day we took her over the schools and cottages. I don't believe she was really interested in anything she saw. And, though she has been at home a year and a half, she has not once offered to take a class in either of the schools.'

'I daresay she sees the schools are well officered, my dear, and doesn't like to interfere with your functions.'

'No, papa, it is not that. She has no vocation for serious things. Her mind is essentially frivolous; you will discover that for yourself by and by. I speak in perfect candour, you know, papa. Whatever your feelings about Miss Lovel may be, I am above concealing mine. I believe I know my duty; but I cannot stoop to hypocrisy.'

'I suppose not. But I must say, you might have taken this business in a pleasanter spirit, Sophia. I shall expect, however, to see you take more pains to overcome your prejudice against the young lady I have chosen for my wife; and I shall be rather slow to believe in your affection for myself unless it shows itself in that manner.'

Miss Granger covered her face with her handkerchief, and burst into a flood of tears.

'O, papa, papa, it only needed that! To think that any one's influence can make my father doubt my affection for him, after all these years of duty and obedience!'

Mr. Granger muttered something about 'duty,' which was the very reverse of a blessing, and walked out of the room, leaving Sophia to her tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

WEDDING BELLS.

THERE was no reason why the marriage should not take place very soon. Mr. Granger said so; Mr. Lovel agreed with him, half reluctantly as it were, and with the air of a man who is far from eager to precipitate events. There was no imaginable reason for delay.

Upon this point Mr. and Mrs. Oliver were as strong as Daniel Granger himself. A union in every way so propitious could not be too speedily made secure. Matthew Oliver was full of demonstrative congratulation now when he dined at Mill Cottage.

'Who would have guessed when I brought you home from the station that morning, and we drove through the park, that you were going to be mistress of it so soon, Clary?' he exclaimed triumphantly. 'Do you remember crying when you heard the place

was sold? I do, poor child; I can see your piteous face at this moment. And now it is going to be yours again. Upon my word, Providence has been very good to you, Clarissa.'

Providence had been very good to her. They all told her the same story. Amongst her few friends there was not one who seemed to suspect that this marriage might be a sacrifice; that in her heart of hearts there might be some image brighter than Daniel Granger's.

She found herself staring at these congratulatory friends in blank amazement sometimes, wondering that they should all look at this engagement of hers from the same point of view, all be so very certain of her happiness.

Had she not reason to be happy, however? There had been a time when she had talked and thought of her lost home almost as Adam and Eve may have done when yet newly expelled from Paradise, with the barren world in all its strangeness before them. Was it not something to win back this beloved dwelling-place—something to obtain comfort for her father's age—to secure an income which might enable her to help her brother in the days to come? Nor was the man she had promised to marry obnoxious to her.

He had done much towards winning her regard in the patient progress of his wooing. She believed him to be a good and honourable man, whose affection was something that a woman might be proud of having won—a man whom it would be a bitter thing to offend. She was clear-sighted enough to perceive his superiority to her father—his utter truthfulness and openness of character. She did feel just a little proud of his love. It was something to see this big strong man, vigorous in mind as in body, reduced to so complete a bondage, yet not undignified even in his slavery.

What was it, then, which came between her and the happiness which that congratulatory chorus made so sure of? Only the image of the man she had loved—the man she had rejected for honour's sake one bleak October evening, and whom she had never ceased to think of since that time. She knew that Daniel Granger was, in all likelihood, a better and a nobler man than George Fairfax; but the face that had been with her in the dimly-lighted railway-carriage, the friendly voice that had cheered her on the first night of her womanhood, were with her still.

More than once, since that wintry afternoon when Mr. Granger had claimed her as his own for the first

time—taking her to his breast with a grave and solemn tenderness, and telling her that every hope and desire of his mind was centred in her, and that all his life to come would be devoted to securing her happiness—more than once since that day she had been tempted to tell her lover all the truth; but shame kept her silent. She did not know how to begin her confession. On that afternoon she had been strangely passive, like a creature stunned by some great surprise; and yet, after what she had said to her father, she had expected every day that Mr. Granger would speak.

After a good deal of discussion among third parties, and an undeviating urgency on the part of Mr. Granger himself, it was arranged that the wedding should take place at the end of May, and that Clarissa should see Switzerland in its brightest aspect. She had once expressed a longing for Alpine peaks and glaciers in her lover's presence, and he had from that moment determined that Switzerland should be the scene of his honeymoon. They would go there so early as to avoid the herd of autumnal wanderers. He knew the country, and could map out the fairest roads for their travels, the pleasantest resting-places for their repose. And if Clarissa cared to explore

Italy afterwards, and spend October and November in Rome, she could do so. All the world would be bright and new to him with her for his companion. He looked forward with boyish eagerness to revisiting scenes that he had fancied himself weary of until now. Yes; such a love as this was indeed a renewal of youth.

To all arrangements made on her behalf Clarissa was submissive. What could a girl, not quite twenty, urge against the will of a man like Daniel Granger, supported by such powerful allies as father, and uncle and aunt, and friends? She thanked him more warmly than usual when he proposed the Swiss tour. Yes; she had wished very much to see that country. Her brother had gone there on a walking expedition when he was little more than a boy, and had very narrowly escaped with his life from the perils of the road. She had some of his Alpine sketches, in a small portfolio of particular treasures, to this day.

Mrs. Oliver revelled in the business of the trousseau. Never since the extravagant days of her early youth had she enjoyed such a feast of millinery. To an aunt the provision of a wedding outfit is peculiarly delightful. She has all the pomp and authority of a

parent, without a parent's responsibility. She stands *in loco parentis* with regard to everything except the bill. No uneasy twinge disturbs her, as the glistening silk glides through the shopman's hands, and ebbs and flows in billows of brightness on the counter. No demon of calculation comes between her and the genius of taste, when the milliner suggests an extra flounce of Malines, or a pelerine of Honiton.

A trip to London, and a fortnight or so spent in West-end shops, would have been very agreeable to Mrs. Oliver; but on mature reflection she convinced herself that to purchase her niece's trousseau in London would be a foolish waste of power. The glory to be obtained in Wigmore or Regent-street was a small thing compared with the *kudos* that would arise to her from the expenditure of a round sum of money among the simple traders of Holborough. Thus it was that Clarissa's wedding finery was all ordered at Brigson and Holder's, the great linendrapers in Holborough market-place, and all made by Miss Mallow, the chief milliner and dressmaker of Holborough, who was in a flutter of excitement from the moment she received the order, and held little levees amongst her most important customers for the exhibition of Miss Lovel's silks and laces.

Towards the end of April there came a letter of congratulation from Lady Laura Armstrong, who was still in Germany; a very cordial and affectionate letter, telling Clarissa that the tidings of her engagement had just reached Baden; but not telling her how the news had come, and containing not a word of allusion to Lady Geraldine or George Fairfax.

'Now that everything is so happily settled, Clary,' wrote my lady, 'without any finesse or diplomacy on my part, I don't mind telling you that I have had this idea in my head from the very first day I saw you. I wanted you to win back Arden Court, the place you love so dearly; and as Mr. Granger, to my mind, is a very charming person, nothing seemed more natural than that my wishes should be realised. But I really did not hope that matters would arrange themselves so easily and so speedily. A thousand good wishes, dear, both for yourself and your papa. We hope to spend the autumn at Hale, and I suppose I shall then have the pleasure of seeing you begin your reign as mistress of Arden Court. You must give a great many parties, and make yourself popular in the neighbourhood at once. *Entre nous*, I think our friend Miss Granger is rather fond of

power. It will be wise on your part to take your stand in the beginning of things, and then affairs are pretty sure to go pleasantly. Ever your affectionate

'LAURA ARMSTRONG.'

Not a word about George Fairfax. Clarissa wondered where he was; whether he was still angry with her, or had forgotten her altogether. The latter seemed the more likely state of affairs. She wondered about him, and then reminded herself that she had no right even to wonder now. His was an image which must be blotted out of her life. She cut all those careless sketches out of her drawing-book. If it had only been as easy to tear the memory of him out of her mind!

The end of May came very quickly, and with it Clarissa's wedding-day. Before that day Miss Granger made a little formal address to her future stepmother—an address worded with studious humility—promising a strict performance of duty on Miss Granger's part in their new relations.

This awful promise was rather alarming to Clarissa, in whose mind Sophia seemed one of those superior persons whom one is bound to respect and admire, yet against whom some evil spark of the

old Adam in our degraded natures is ever ready to revolt.

'Pray don't talk of duty, my dear Sophia,' she answered in a shy tremulous way, clinging a little closer to Mr. Granger's arm. It was at Mill Cottage that this conversation took place, a few days before the wedding. 'There can scarcely be a question of duty between people of the same age, like you and me. But I hope we shall get to love each other more and more every day.'

'Of course you will,' cried Daniel Granger heartily. 'Why should you not love each other? If your tastes don't happen to be exactly the same just now, habitual intercourse will smooth down all that, and you'll find all manner of things in which you *can* sympathise. I've told Sophy that I don't suppose you'll interfere much with her housekeeping, Clarissa. That's rather a strong point with her, and I don't think it's much in your line.'

Miss Granger tightened her thin lips with a little convulsive movement. This speech seemed to imply that Miss Lovel's was a loftier line than hers.

Clarissa remembered Lady Laura's warning, and felt that she might be doing wrong in surrendering the housekeeping. But then, on the other hand, she

felt herself quite unable to cope with Miss Granger's account-books.

'I have never kept a large house,' she said. 'I should be very sorry to interfere.'

'I was sure of it,' exclaimed Mr. Granger; 'and you will have more time to be my companion, Clarissa, if your brain is not muddled with groceries and butcher's-meat. You see, Sophia has such a peculiarly business-like mind.'

'However humble my gifts may be, I have always endeavoured to employ them for your benefit, papa,' Miss Granger replied with a frosty air.

She had come to dine at Mill Cottage for the first time since she had known of her father's engagement. She had come in deference to her father's express desire, and it was a hard thing for her to offer even this small tribute to Clarissa. It was a little family dinner—the Olivers, Mr. Padget, the rector of Arden, who was to assist cheery Matthew Oliver in tying the fatal knot, and Mr. and Miss Granger—a pleasant little party of seven, for whom Mr. Lovel's cook had prepared quite a model dinner. She had acquired a specialty for about half-a-dozen dishes which her master affected, and in the preparation of these could take her stand against the pampered ma-

tron who ruled Mr. Granger's kitchen at a stipend of seventy guineas a year, and whose subordinate and assistant had serious thoughts of launching herself upon the world as a professed cook, by advertisement in the *Times*—'clear soups, entrées, ices, &c.'

The wedding was to be a very quiet one. Mr. Lovel had expressed a strong desire that it should be so; and Mr. Granger's wishes in no way clashed with those of his father-in-law.

'I am a man of fallen fortunes,' said Mr. Lovel, 'and all Yorkshire knows my history. Anything like pomp or publicity would be out of place in the marriage of my daughter. When she is your wife it will be different. Her position will be a very fine one; for she will have some of the oldest blood in the county, supported by abundance of money. The Lycians used to take their names from their mothers. I think, if you have a son, Granger, you ought to call him Lovel.'

'I should be proud to do so,' answered Mr. Granger. 'I am not likely to forget that my wife is my superior in social rank.'

'A superiority that counts for very little when unsustained by hard cash, my dear Granger,' returned Marmaduke Lovel lightly. He was supremely con-

tent with the state of affairs, and had no wish to humiliate his son-in-law.

So the wedding was performed as simply as if Miss Lovel had been uniting her fortunes with those of some fledgling of the curate species. There were only two bridesmaids—Miss Granger, who performed the office with an unwilling heart; and Miss Pontifex, a flaxen-haired young lady of high family and no particular means, provided for the occasion by Mrs. Oliver, at whose house she and Clarissa had become acquainted. There was a breakfast, elegant enough in its way—for the Holborough confectioner had been put upon his mettle by Mrs. Oliver—served prettily in the cottage parlour. The sun shone brightly upon Mr. Granger's espousals. The village children lined the churchyard walk, and strewed spring flowers upon the path of bride and bridegroom—tender vernal blossoms which scarcely harmonised with Daniel Granger's stalwart presence and fifty years. Clarissa, very pale and still, with a strange fixed look on her face, came out of the little church upon her husband's arm; and it seemed to her in that hour as if all the life before her was like an unknown country, hidden by a great cloud.

CHAPTER IX.

COMING HOME.

THE leaves were yellowing in the park and woods round Arden Court, and the long avenue began to wear a somewhat dreary look, before Mr. Granger brought his young wife home. It was October again, and the weather bleaker and colder than one has a right to expect in October. Mr. Lovel was at Spa, recruiting his health in the soft breezes that blow across the pine-clad hills, and leading a pleasant elderly-bachelor existence at one of the best hotels in the bright little inland watering-place. The shutters were closed at Mill Cottage, and the pretty rustic dwelling was left in the care of the honest housekeeper and her handmaiden, the rosy-faced parlour-maid, who dusted master's books and hung linen draperies before master's bookcases with a pious awe.

Miss Granger had spent some part of her father's honeymoon in paying visits to those friends who were

eager to have her, and who took this opportunity of showing special attention to the fallen heiress. The sense of her lost prestige was always upon her, however, and she was scarcely as grateful as she might have been for the courtesy she received. People seemed never weary of talking about her father's wife, whose sweetness, and beauty, and other interesting qualities, Miss Granger found herself called upon to discuss continually. She did not bow the knee to the popular idol, however, but confessed with a charming candour that there was no great sympathy between her stepmother and herself.

'Her education has been so different from mine,' she said, 'that it is scarcely strange if all our tastes are different. But, of course, I shall do my duty towards her, and I hope and pray that she may make my father happy.'

But Miss Granger did not waste all the summer months in visiting. She was more in her element at the Court. The model children in the new Arden poor-schools had rather a hard time of it during Mr. Granger's honeymoon, and were driven through Kings and Chronicles at a more severe pace than usual. The hardest and driest facts in geography and grammar were pelted like summer hail upon

their weak young brains, and a 'sterner demand was made every day upon their juvenile powers of calculation. This Miss Granger called giving them a solid foundation; but as the edifice destined to be erected upon this educational basis was generally of the humblest—a career of carpentering, or blacksmithing, or housemaiding, or plain-cooking, for the most part—it is doubtful whether that accurate knowledge of the objective case or the longitude of the Sandwich Islands which Miss Granger so resolutely insisted upon, was ever of any great service to the grown-up scholar.

In these philanthropic labours she had always an ardent assistant in the person of Mr. Tillott, whose somewhat sandy head and florid complexion used to appear at the open door of the schoolroom very often when Sophia was teaching. He did really admire her, with all sincerity and singleness of heart; describing her, in long confidential letters to his mother, as a woman possessed of every gift calculated to promote a man's advancement in this world and the next. He knew that her father's second marriage must needs make a considerable change in her position. There would be an heir, in all probability, and Sophia would no longer be the great heiress she had been. But she would be richly

dowered doubtless, come what might; and she was brought nearer to the aspirations of a curate by this reduction of her fortune.

Miss Granger accepted the young priest's services, and patronised him with a sublime unconsciousness of his aspirations. She had heard it whispered that his father had been a grocer, and that he had an elder brother who still carried on a prosperous colonial trade in the City. For anything like retail trade Miss Granger had a profound contempt. She had all the pride of a parvenu, and all the narrowness of mind common to a woman who lives in a world of her own creation. So while Mr. Tillott flattered himself that he was making no slight impression upon her heart, Miss Granger regarded him as just a little above the head gardener and the certificated schoolmaster.

October came, and the day appointed for the return of the master of Arden Court; rather a gloomy day, and one in a succession of wet and dismal days, with a dull gray sky that narrowed the prospect, and frequent showers of drizzling rain. Miss Granger had received numerous letters from her father during his travels, letters which were affectionate if brief; and longer epistles from Clarissa, describing their

route and adventures. They had done Switzerland thoroughly, and had spent the last month in Rome.

The interior of the old house looked all the brighter, perhaps, because of that dull sky, and those sodden woods without. Fires were blazing merrily in all the rooms; for, whatever Miss Granger's secret feelings might be, the servants were bent on showing allegiance to the new power, and on giving the house a gala aspect in honour of their master's return. The chief gardener, with a temporary indifference to his own interests, had stripped his hothouses for the decoration of the rooms, and great vases of exotics made the atmosphere odorous, and contrasted pleasantly with the wintry fires.

Miss Granger sat in the principal drawing-room, with her embroidery-frame before her, determined not to be flurried or disturbed by the bride's return. She sat at a respectful distance from the blazing logs, with a screen interposed carefully between her complexion and the fire, the very image of stiffness and propriety; not one of her dull brown hairs ruffled, not a fold of her dark green-silk dress disarranged.

The carriage was to meet the London express at Holborough station at half-past four, and at a little

before five Miss Granger heard the sound of wheels in the avenue. She did not even rise from her embroidery-frame to watch the approach of the carriage, but went on steadily stitch by stitch at the ear of a Blenheim spaniel. In a few minutes more she heard the clang of doors thrown open, then the wheels upon the gravel in the quadrangle, and then her father's voice, sonorous as of old. Even then she did not fly to welcome him, though her heart beat a little faster, and the colour deepened in her cheeks.

'I am nothing to him now,' she thought.

She began to lay aside her wools, however, and rose as the drawing-room door opened, to offer the travellers a stately welcome.

Clarissa was looking her loveliest, in violet silk, with a good deal of fur about her, and with an air of style and fashion which was new to her, Miss Granger thought. The two young women kissed each other in a formal way, and then Mr. Granger embraced his daughter with some show of affection.

'How lovely the dear old place looks!' cried Clarissa, as the one triumph and glory of her marriage came home to her mind: she was mistress of Arden Court. 'Everything is so warm and bright and cheerful, such an improvement upon foreign houses.

What a feast of fires and flowers you have prepared to welcome us, Sophia!'

She wished to say something cordial to her step-daughter, and she did really believe that the festive aspect of the house was Miss Granger's work.

'I have not interfered with the servants' arrangements,' that young lady replied primly; 'I hope you don't find so many exotics oppressive in these hot rooms? *I* do.'

'O dear, no; they are so lovely,' answered Clarissa, bending over a pyramid of stephanotis, 'one can scarcely have too many of them. Not if the perfume makes your head ache, however; in that case they had better be sent away at once.'

But Miss Granger protested against this with an air of meek endurance, and the flowers were left undisturbed.

'Well, Sophy, what have you been doing with yourself all this time?' Mr. Granger asked in a cheerful voice; 'gadding about finely, according to your letters.'

'I spent a week with the Stapletons, and ten days with the Trevors, and I went to Scarborough with the Chesneys, as you expressed a wish that I should accept their invitation, papa,' Miss Granger

replied dutifully; 'but I really think I am happier at home.'

'I'm very glad to hear it, my dear, and I hope you'll find your home pleasanter than ever now.—So you like the look of the old place, do you, Clary?' he went on, turning to his wife; 'and you don't think we've quite spoilt it by our renovation?'

'O no, indeed. There can be no doubt as to your improvements. And yet, do you know, I was so fond of the place, that I am almost sorry to miss its old shabbiness—the faded curtains, and the queer Indian furniture which my great-uncle, Colonel Radnor, brought home from Bombay. I wonder what became of those curious old cabinets?'

'I daresay they are still extant in some lumber-room in the roof, my dear. Your father took very little of the old furniture away with him, and there was nothing sold. We'll explore the garrets some day, and look for your Indian cabinets.—Will you take Clarissa to her rooms, Sophy, and see what she thinks of our arrangements?'

Miss Granger would gladly have delegated this office to a servant; but her father's word was law; so she led the way to a suite of apartments which Daniel Granger had ordered to be prepared for his

young wife, and which Clarissa had not yet been allowed to see. They had been kept as a pleasant surprise for her coming home.

Had she been a princess of the blood royal, she could not have had finer rooms, or a more perfect taste in the arrangement of them. Money can do so much, when the man who dispenses it has the art of intrusting the carrying out of his desires to the best workmen.

Clarissa was delighted with everything, and really grateful for the generous affection which had done so much to gratify her.

'It is all a great deal too handsome,' she said.

'I am glad you like the style in which they have carried out papa's ideas,' replied Miss Granger; 'for my own part, I like plainer furniture, and more room for one's work; but it is all a matter of taste.'

They were in the boudoir, a perfect gem of a room, with satin-wood furniture and pale green-silk hangings; its only ornaments a set of priceless Wedgwood vases in cream colour and white, and a few water-coloured sketches by Turner, and Creswick, and Stanfield. The dressing-room opened out of this, and was furnished in the same style, with a dressing-table that was a marvel of art and splen-

dour, the looking-glass in a frame of oxydised silver, between two monster jewel-cases of ebony and malachite with oxydised silver mouldings. One entire side of this room was occupied by an inlaid maple wardrobe, with seven doors, and Clarissa's monogram on all of them—a receptacle that might have contained the multifarious costumes of a Princess Metternich.

It would have been difficult for Clarissa not to be pleased with such tribute, ungracious not to have expressed her pleasure; so when Daniel Granger came presently to ask how she liked her rooms, she was not slow to give utterance to her admiration.

'You give me so much more than I deserve, Mr. Granger,' she said, after having admired everything; 'I feel almost humiliated by your generosity.'

'Clarissa,' exclaimed her husband, putting his two hands upon her shoulders, and looking gravely down at her, 'when will you remember that I have a Christian name? When am I to be something more to you than Mr. Granger?'

'You are all that is good to me, much too good,' she faltered. 'I will call you Daniel, if you like. It is only a habit.'

'It has such a cold sound, Clary. I know Daniel

isn't a pretty name; but the elder sons of the Grangers have been Daniels for the last two centuries. We were stanch Puritans, you know, in the days of old Oliver, and scriptural names became a fashion with us. Well, my dear, I'll leave you to dress for dinner. I'm very glad you like the rooms. Here are the keys of your jewel-cases; we must contrive to fill them by and by. You see I have no family diamonds to reset for you.'

'You have given me more than enough jewelry already,' said Clarissa. And indeed Mr. Granger had showered gifts upon her with a lavish hand during his brief courtship.

'Pshaw, child! only a few trinkets bought at random. I mean to fill those cases with something better. I'll go and change my coat. We dine half an hour earlier than usual to-day, Sophia tells me.'

Mr. Granger retired to his dressing-room on the other side of the spacious bed-chamber, perhaps the very plainest apartment in the house, for he was as simple in his habits as the great Duke of Wellington; a room with a monster bath on one side, and a battered oak office-desk on the other—a desk that had done duty for fifty years or so in an office at Leeds—in one corner a well-filled gunstand, in an-

other a rack of formidable-looking boots—boots that only a strong-minded man could wear.

When she was quite alone, Clarissa sat down in one of the windows of her boudoir, and looked out at the park. How well she remembered the prospect! how often she had looked at it on just such darksome autumnal evenings long ago, when she was little more than a child! This very room had been her mother's dressing-room. She remembered it deserted and tenantless, the faded finery of the furniture growing dimmer and duller year by year. She had come here in an exploring mood sometimes when she was quite a child, but she never remembered the room having been put to any use; and as she had grown older it had come to have a haunted air, and she had touched the inanimate things with a sense of awe, wondering what her mother's life had been like in that room—trying to conjure up the living image of a lovely face, which was familiar to her from more than one picture in her father's possession.

She knew more about her mother's life now; knew that there had been a blight upon it, of which a bad unscrupulous man had been the cause. And that man was the father of George Fairfax.

'Papa had reason to fear the son, having suffered

so bitterly from the influence of the father,' she said to herself; and then the face that she had first seen in the railway carriage shone before her once more, and her thoughts drifted away from Arden Court.

She remembered that promise which George Fairfax had made her—the promise that he would try and find out something about her brother Austin.

He had talked of hunting up a man who had been a close friend of the absent wanderer's; but it seemed as if he had made no effort to keep his word. After that angry farewell in the orchard, Clarissa could, of course, expect no favour from him; but he might have done something before that. She longed so ardently to know her brother's fate, to find some means of communication with him, now that she was rich and able to help him in his exile. He was starving, perhaps, in a strange land, while she was surrounded by all this splendour, and had five hundred a year for pocket money.

Her maid came in to light the candles, and remind her of the dinner-hour, while she was still looking out at the darkening woods. The maid was an honest country-bred young woman, selected for the office by Mrs. Oliver. She had accompanied her mistress on the honeymoon tour, and had been dazed

and not a little terrified by the wonders of Swiss landscape and the grandeurs of fallen Rome.

'I've been listening for your bell ever so long, ma'am,' said the girl; 'you'll scarcely have time to dress.'

There was time, however, for Mrs. Granger's toilet, which was not an elaborate one; and she was seated by the drawing-room fire talking to her husband when the second dinner-bell rang.

They were not a very lively party that evening. The old adage about three not being company went near to be verified in this particular case. The presence of any one so thoroughly unsympathetic as Sophia Granger was in itself sufficient to freeze any small circle. But although they did not talk much, Clarissa and her husband seemed to be on excellent terms. Sophia, who watched them closely during that initiatory evening, perceived this, and told herself that her father had not yet discovered the mistake which he had made. That he would make such a discovery sooner or later was her profound conviction. It was only a question of time.

Thus it was that Clarissa's new life began. She knew herself beloved by her husband with a quiet unobtrusive affection, the depth and wide measure

whereof had come home to her very often since her marriage with a sense of obligation that was almost a burden. She knew this, and knew that she could give but little in return for so much—the merest, coldest show of duty and obedience in recompense for all the love of this honest heart. If love had been a lesson to be learnt, she would have learned it, for she was not ungrateful, not unmindful of her obligations, or the vow that she had spoken in Arden Church; but as this flower called love must spring spontaneous in the human breast, and is not commonly responsive to the efforts of the most zealous cultivator, Clarissa was fain to confess to herself after five months of wedded life that her heart was still barren, and that her husband was little more to her than he had been at the very first, when for the redemption of her father's fortunes she had consented to become his wife.

So the time went on, with much gaiety in the way of feasting and company at Arden Court, and a palpable dulness when there were no visitors. Mr. and Mrs. Granger went out a good deal, sometimes accompanied by Sophia, sometimes without her; and Clarissa was elected by the popular voice the most beautiful woman in that part of the country. The

people who knew her talked of her so much, that other people who had not met her were eager to see her, and made quite a favour of being introduced to her. If she knew of this herself, it gave her no concern; but it was a matter of no small pride to Daniel Granger that his young wife should be so much admired.

Was he quite happy, having won for himself the woman he loved, seeing her obedient, submissive, always ready to attend his pleasure, to be his companion when he wanted her company, with no inclination of her own which she was not willing to sacrifice at a moment's notice for his gratification? Was he quite happy in the triumph of his hopes? Well, not quite. He knew that his wife did not love him. It might come some day perhaps, that affection for which he still dared to hope, but it had not come yet. He watched her face sometimes as she sat by his hearth on those quiet evenings when they were alone, and he knew that a light should have shone upon it that was not there. He would sigh sometimes as he read his newspaper by that domestic hearth, and his wife would wonder if he were troubled by any business cares—whether he were disturbed by any abnormal commotion among those stocks or

consols or other mysterious elements of the financial world in which all rich men seemed more or less concerned. She did not ever venture to question him as to those occasional sighs; but she would bring the draught-board and place it at his elbow, and sit meekly down to be beaten at a game she hated, but for which Mr. Granger had a peculiar affection.

It will be seen, therefore, that Clarissa was at least a dutiful wife, anxious to give her husband every tribute that gratitude and a deep sense of obligation could suggest. Even Sophia Granger, always on the watch for some sign of weariness or shortcoming, could discover no cause for complaint in her stepmother's conduct.

Mr. Lovel came back to Mill Cottage in December, much improved and renovated by the Belgian waters or the gaieties of the bright little pleasure place. The sense of having made an end of his difficulties, and being moored in a safe harbour for the rest of his life, may have done much towards giving him a new lease of existence. Whatever the cause may have been, he was certainly an altered man, and his daughter rejoiced in the change. To her his manner was at once affectionate and deferential, as if there had been lurking in his breast some con-

sciousness that she had sacrificed herself for his welfare. She felt this, and felt that her marriage had given her something more than Arden Court, if it had won for her her father's love. He spent some time at the Court, in deference to her wishes, during those dark winter months; and they fell back on their old readings, and the evenings seemed gayer and happier for the introduction of this intellectual element, which was not allowed to prevail to such an extent as to overpower the practical Daniel Granger.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SEASON.

In the spring Mr. Granger took his wife and daughter to London, where they spent a couple of months in Clarges-street, and saw a good deal of society in what may be called the upper range of middle-class life—rich merchants and successful professional men living in fine houses at the West-end, enlivened with a sprinkling from the ranks of the baronetage and lesser nobility. In this circle Mr. Granger occupied rather a lofty standing, as the owner of one of the finest estates in Yorkshire, and of a fortune which the common love of the marvellous exalted into something fabulous. He found himself more popular than ever since his marriage, as the husband of one of the prettiest women who had appeared that season. So, during the two months of their London life, there was an almost unbroken succession of gaieties, and

Mr. Granger found himself yearning for the repose of Arden Court sometimes, as he waited in a crowded ballroom while his wife and daughter danced their last quadrille. It pleased him that Clarissa should taste this particular pleasure-cup—that she should have every delight she had a right to expect as his wife; but it pleased him not the less when she frankly confessed to him one day that this brilliant round of parties and party-giving had very few charms for her, and that she would be glad to go back to Arden.

In London Clarissa met Lady Laura Armstrong; for the first time since that September afternoon in which she had promised that no arts of George Fairfax's should move her to listen to him. Lord Calderwood had been dead a year and a half, and my lady was resplendent once more, and giving weekly receptions in Mr. Armstrong's great house in Portland-place—a corner house, with about a quarter of a mile of drawing-rooms, stretching back into one of the lateral streets. For Mr. and Mrs. Granger she gave a special dinner, with an evening party afterwards; and she took up a good deal of Clarissa's time by friendly morning calls, and affectionate insistance upon Mrs. Granger's company in her afternoon drives,

and at her daily kettle-drums—drives and kettle-drums from which Miss Granger felt herself more or less excluded.

It was during one of these airings, when they had left the crowd and splendour of the Park, and were driving to Roehampton, that Clarissa heard the name of George Fairfax once more. Until this afternoon, by some strange accident as it seemed, Lady Laura had never mentioned her sister's lover.

'I suppose you heard that it was all broken off?' she said, rather abruptly, and apropos to nothing particular.

'Broken off, Lady Laura?'

'I mean Geraldine's engagement. People are so fond of talking about those things; you must have heard, surely, Clary.'

'No, indeed, I have heard nothing.'

'That's very curious. It has been broken off ever so long—soon after poor papa's death, in fact. But you know what Geraldine is—so reserved—almost impenetrable, as one may say. I knew nothing of what had happened myself, till one day—months after the breach had occurred, it seems—when I made some allusion to Geraldine's marriage, she stopped me, in her cold, proud way, saying, "It's just as well

I should tell you that that affair is all off, Laura. Mr. Fairfax and I have wished each other good-bye for ever." That's what I call a crushing blow for a sister, Clarissa. You know how I had set my heart upon that marriage.'

'I am very sorry,' faltered Clarissa. 'They had quarrelled, I suppose.'

'Quarrelled! O, dear no; she had not seen him since she left Hale with Frederick and me, and they parted with every appearance of affection. No; there had been some letters between them, that was all. I have never been able to discover the actual cause of their parting. Geraldine refused to answer any questions, in a most arbitrary manner. It is a hard thing, Clarissa; for I know that she loved him.'

'And where is Lady Geraldine now?'

'At Hale, with my children. She has no regular home of her own now, you see, poor girl, and she did not care about another season in London—she has had enough of that kind of thing—so she begged me to let her stay at the Castle, and superintend the governesses, and amuse herself in her own way. Life is full of trouble, Clary!' and here the mistress of Hale Castle, and of some seventy thousand per annum, gave a despondent sigh.

'Have you seen Mr. Fairfax since you came from Germany?' asked Clarissa.

'Yes, I have met him once—some months ago. You may be sure that I was tolerably cool to him. He has been very little in society lately, and has been leading rather a wild life in Paris, I hear. A prudent marriage would have been his redemption; but I daresay it will end in his throwing himself away upon some worthless person.'

It was a relief to Clarissa to hear that George Fairfax was in Paris, though that was very near. But in her ignorance of his whereabouts she had fancied him still nearer, and in all her London festivities had been tormented by a perpetual dread of meeting him. Many times even she had imagined that she saw his face across the crowd, and had been relieved to find it was only a face that bore some faint resemblance to his.

He had kept his word, then, so far as the breaking of his engagement to Geraldine Challoner. He had been more in earnest than Clarissa had believed. She thought that she was sorry for this; but it is doubtful whether the regretful feeling in her heart was really sorrow for Lady Geraldine. She thought of George Fairfax a good deal after this conversation

with Lady Laura—alas, when had she ceased to think of him!—and all the splendours and pleasures of her married life seemed to her more than ever worthless. What a hopeless entanglement, what a dismal mistake, her existence was! Had she sold herself for these things—for Arden Court and a town house, and unlimited millinery? No; again and again she told herself she had married Daniel Granger for her father's sake, and perhaps a little from a desire to keep faith with Lady Laura.

This marriage had seemed to her the only perfect fulfilment of her promise that nothing should induce her to marry George Fairfax. But the sacrifice had been useless, since he had broken his engagement to Geraldine Challoner.

Sophia Granger's lynx eyes perceived a change in her stepmother about this time. Clarissa had never appeared especially enraptured by the gaieties of fashionable London; but there had come upon her of late a languor and weariness of spirit which she tried in vain to disguise by an assumed air of enjoyment. That simulated gaiety deluded her husband, but it could not deceive Miss Granger.

'She's getting tired of her life already, even here where we have a perpetual round of amusements,'

Sophia said to herself. 'What will she be when we go back to Yorkshire?'

The time was close at hand for the return to Arden, when the thing which Clarissa had feared came to pass, and the hazard of London life brought her face to face with George Fairfax.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. WOOSTER.

THE season was at its height, and the Grangers found every available hour of their existence engaged in visiting and receiving visitors. There were so many people whom Lady Laura insisted upon introducing to her dear Clarissa—there was so much in the way of party-giving that Lady Laura wanted her sweet Mrs. Granger to do. Now it was a morning concert of my lady's planning, at which weird and wonderful-looking denizens of the Norseland—Poles, Hungarians, Danes, and Swedes—with unkempt hair and fierce flashing eyes, performed upon every variety of native instrument, or sang wild national songs in some strange language—concerts to which Lady Laura brought herds of more or less fashionable people, all of whom were languishing to know 'that sweet Mrs. Granger.' My lady had taken pains to advertise

her share in the manufacturer's marriage. Every one belonging to her set knew that the match was her contriving, and that Clarissa had to thank the mistress of Hale Castle for her millionaire husband. She was really proud of her protégée's success, and was never tired of praising her and 'that admirable Granger.'

That admirable Granger endured the accession of party-giving with very good grace. It pleased him to see his wife admired; it pleased him still more to see her happy; and he was single-minded enough to believe her increased volatility a symptom of increased happiness. Whatever undefined regrets and dim forebodings there might be lurking in his own mind, he had no doubt of his wife's integrity—no fear of hidden perils in this ordeal of fashionable life.

She would come to love him in time, he said to himself, trusting as blindly in the power of time to work this wonder for him as Clarissa herself had trusted when she set herself to win her father's affection. He believed this not so much because the thing was probable or feasible, as because he desired it with an intensity of feeling that blinded him to the force of hard facts. He—the man who had never made a false reckoning in the mathematics of business-life—

whose whole career was unmarred by a mistake—whose greatest successes had been the result of unrivalled coolness of brain and unerring foresight—he, the hard-headed, far-seeing man of the world—was simple as a child in this matter, which involved the greater hazard of his heart.

But while Clarissa's husband trusted her with such boundless confidence, Clarissa's stepdaughter watched her with the vigilant eyes of prejudice, not to say hatred. That a young lady so well brought up as Miss Granger—so thoroughly grounded in Kings and Chronicles—should entertain the vulgar passion of hate, seemed quite out of the question; but so far as a ladylike aversion may go, Miss Granger certainly went in relation to her stepmother. In this she was sustained by that model damsel Hannah Warman, who, not having made much progress in Mrs. Granger's liking, had discovered that she could not 'take to' that lady, and was always ready to dilate upon her shortcomings, whenever her mistress permitted. Sophia was capricious in this, sometimes listening eagerly, at other times suppressing Miss Warman with a high hand.

So Clarissa had, unawares, an enemy within her gates, and could turn neither to the right nor to the

left without her motives for so turning becoming the subject of a close and profound scrutiny. It is hard to say what shape Miss Granger's doubts assumed. If put into the witness-box and subjected to the cross-examination of a popular queen's-counsel, she would have found it very difficult to give a substance or a form to her suspicions. She could only have argued in a general way, that Mrs. Granger was frivolous, and that any kind of wrong-doing might be expected from so light-minded a person.

It was the beginning of June, and West-end London was glorious with the brief brilliancy of the early summer. All the Mayfair balconies were bright with flowers, and the Mayfair knockers resounded perpetually under the hand of the archetypal Jeames. The weather was unusually warm; the most perfect weather for garden-parties, every one declared, and there were several of these *al fresco* assemblies inscribed in Mrs. Granger's visiting-book: one at Wimbledon; another as far afield as Henley-on-Thames, at a villa whose grounds sloped down to the river.

This Henley party was an affair in which Lady Laura Armstrong was particularly interested. It was given by a bachelor friend of her husband's, a fabulously rich stockbroker; and it was Lady Laura who

had brought the proprietor of the villa to Clarges-street, and who had been instrumental in the getting-up of the fête.

'You must really give us some kind of party at your Henley place this year, Mr. Wooster,' she said. 'There is the regatta now: I have positively not seen the Henley regatta for three years. The Putney business is all very well—supremely delightful, in short, while it lasts—but such a mere lightning flash of excitement. I like a long day's racing, such as one gets at Henley.'

'Lady Laura ought to be aware that my house is at her disposal all the year round, and that she has only to signify her pleasure to her most devoted slave.'

'O, that's all very well,' replied my lady. 'Of course, I know that if Frederick and I were to come down, you would give us luncheon or dinner, and let us roam about the gardens as long as we liked. But that's not what I want. I want you to give a party on one of the race days, and invite all the nice people in London.'

'Are there any nasty people on this side of Temple-bar, Lady Laura, before the closing of Parliament? I thought, in the season everybody was nice.'

'You know what I mean, sir. I want the really

pleasant people. Half a dozen painters or so, and some of the nicest literary men—not the men who write the best books, but the men who talk cleverly; and, of course, a heap of musical people—they are always nice, except to one another. You must have marquees on the lawn for the luncheon—your house is too small for anything more than tea and coffee; and for once let there be no such thing as croquet—that alone will give your party an air of originality. I suppose you had better put yourself entirely into Gunter's hands for the commissariat, and be sure you tell him you want novelty—no hackneyed ideas; sparklè and originality in everything, from the eggs to the apples. I should ask you to give us a dance in the evening, with coloured lamps, if that were practicable, but there is the coming back to town; and if we carried the business on to a breakfast next morning, some of the people might begin to be tired, and the women would look faded and limp. So I think we had better confine ourselves to a mere garden-party and luncheon, without any dancing,' Lady Laura concluded with a faint sigh.

'Will you send out the invitations, Lady Laura?'

'O, no; I leave all that to you. You really know everybody—or everybody we need care about.'

In this manner Mr. Wooster's party had been arranged, and to this party the Grangers were bidden. Even the serious Sophia was going; indeed, it is to be observed that this young lady joined in all mundane gaieties, under protest as it were.

'I go out, my dear, but I never enjoy myself,' she would say to a serious friend, as if that were a kind of merit. 'Papa wishes me to go, and I have no desire to withdraw myself in any way from Mrs. Granger's amusements, however little sympathy there may be between us. I endeavour to do *my* duty, whatever the result may be.'

Mr. Wooster did know a great many people. His abnormal wealth, and a certain amount of cleverness, had been his sole passports to society. Among Burke's *Landed Gentry* there was no trace of the Wooster family, nor had Mr. Wooster ever been heard to allude to a grandfather. He had begun stockjobbing in the smallest way, but had at a very early stage of his career developed a remarkable genius for this kind of traffic. Those of his own set who had watched his steady ascent declared him to be a very remarkable man; and the denizens of the West-end world, who knew nothing of stockjobbing or stockbroking, were

quite ready to receive him when he came to them laden with the gold of Ophir, and with a reputation of being something distinguished upon 'Change.

Time had begun to thin Mr. Wooster's flowing locks before he landed himself safely upon the shores of fashionable life, and Mr. Wooster's carefully-trained moustache and whiskers had a purplish tinge that looked more like art than nature. He was short and stout, with a florid complexion, sharp black eyes, and a large aquiline nose, and considered himself eminently handsome. He dressed with elaborate splendour—'dressed for two,' as some of his less gorgeous friends were wont to say—and was reputed to spend a small fortune annually in exotics. for his buttonhole, and in dress boots.

His chief merits in the estimation of the polite world lay in the possession of a perfectly-appointed town house, the villa at Henley, another villa at Cowes, and a couple of magnificent yachts. He was a perpetual giver of dinners, and spent his existence between the Stock Exchange and the dinner-table, devoting whatever mental force remained to him after his daily traffic to the study of menus, and the grave consideration of wine-lists.

To dine with Wooster was one of the right things

to do once or twice in the course of a season; and Wooster's steam yacht was a pleasant place of rest and haven of safety for any juvenile member of the peerage who had been plunging heavily, and went in fear of the Bankruptcy-court.

So, on a brilliant June morning, the Grangers left the Great Western station by special train, and sped through the summer landscape to Henley. This garden-party at Mr. Wooster's villa was almost their last engagement. They were to return to Arden in two days; and Clarissa was very glad that it was so. That weariness of spirit which had seemed to her so strange in some of the young ladies at Hale Castle had come upon herself. She longed for Arden Court and perfect rest; and then she remembered, with something like a shudder, that there were people invited for the autumn, and that Lady Laura Armstrong had promised to spend a week with her dearest Clarissa.

'I want to put you into the way of managing that great house, Clary,' said my lady, brimming over with goodnature and officiousness. 'As to leaving the housekeeping in Miss Granger's hands, that's not to be dreamt of. It might do very well for the first six months—just to let her down gently, as it were—

but from henceforth you must hold the reins yourself, Clary, and I'll teach you how to drive.'

'But, dear Lady Laura, I don't want the trouble and responsibility of housekeeping. I would much rather leave all that in Sophy's hands,' protested Clarissa. 'You have no idea how clever she is. And I have my own rooms, and my painting.'

'Yes,' exclaimed Lady Laura, 'and you will mope yourself to death in your own rooms, with your painting, whenever you have no company in the house. You are not going to become a cipher, surely, Clarissa! What with Miss Granger's schools, and Miss Granger's clothing-club, and Miss Granger's premiums and prizes for this, that, and the other, you stand a fair chance of sinking into the veriest nobody, or you would, if it were not for your pretty face. And then you really must have employment for your mind, Clary. Look at me; see the work I get through.'

'But you are a wonder, dear Lady Laura, and I have neither your energy nor your industry.'

Laura Armstrong would not admit this, and held to the idea of putting Clarissa in the right way.

'Wait till I come to you in the autumn,' she said. And in that depression of spirit which had grown

upon her of late, Mrs. Granger found it a hard thing to say that she should be rejoiced when that time came.

She wanted to get back to Arden Court, and was proud to think of herself as the mistress of the place she loved so dearly; but it seemed to her that an existence weighed down at once by the wisdom of Sophia Granger and the exuberant gaiety of Lady Laura would be barely endurable. She sighed for Arden Court as she remembered it in her childhood —the dreamy quiet of the dull old house, brightened only by her brother's presence; the perfect freedom of her own life, so different from the life whose every hour was subject to the claims of others.

She had changed very much since that visit to Hale Castle. Then all the pleasures of life were new to her—to-day they seemed all alike flat, stale, and unprofitable. She had been surfeited with splendours and pleasures since her marriage. The wealth which Daniel Granger so freely lavished upon her had rendered these things common all at once. She looked back and wondered whether she had really ever longed for a new dress, and been gladdened by the possession of a five-pound note.

CHAPTER XII.

'IF I SHOULD MEET THEE—'

Mr. Wooster's villa was almost perfection in its way; but there was something of that ostentatious simplicity whereby the parvenu endeavours sometimes to escape from the vulgar glitter of his wealth. The chairs and tables were of unpolished oak, and of a rustic fashion. There were no pictures, but the walls of the dining-room were covered with majolica panels of a pale gray ground, whereon sported groups of shepherds and shepherdesses after Boucher, painted on the earthenware with the airiest brush in delicate rose-colour; the drawing-room and breakfast-room were lined with fluted chintz, in which the same delicate grays and rose colours were the prevailing hues. The floors were of inlaid woods, covered only by a small Persian carpet here and there. There was no buhl or marquetery, not a scrap of gilding or a yard

of silk or satin, in the house; but there was an all-pervading coolness, and in every room the perfume of freshly-gathered flowers.

Mr. Wooster told his fashionable acquaintance that in winter the villa was a howling wilderness by reason of damp and rats; but there were those of his Bohemian friends who could have told of jovial parties assembled there in November, and saturnalias celebrated there in January; for Mr. Wooster was a bachelor of very liberal opinions, and had two sets of visitors.

To-day the villa was looking its best and brightest. The hothouses had been almost emptied of their choicest treasures in order to fill jardinières and vases for all the rooms. Mr. Wooster had obeyed Lady Laura, and there was nothing but tea, coffee, and ices to be had in the house; nor were the tea and coffee dispensed in the usual business-like manner, which reduces private hospitality to the level of a counter at a railway-station. Instead of this, there were about fifty little tables dotted about the rooms, each provided with a gem of a teapot and egg-shell cups and saucers for three or four, so that Mr. Wooster's feminine visitors might themselves have the delight of dispensing that most feminine of all beverages.

This contrivance gave scope for flirtation, and was loudly praised by Mr. Wooster's guests.

The gardens of the villa were large—indeed, the stockbroker had pulled down a fine old family mansion to get a site for his dainty little dwelling. There was a good stretch of river-frontage, from which the crowd could watch the boats flash by; now the striped shirts shooting far ahead to the cry of 'Bravo, Brazenose!' anon the glitter of a line of light-blue caps, as the Etonian crew answered to the call of their coxswain and made a gallant attempt to catch their powerful opponents; while Radley, overmatched and outweighted, though by no means a bad crew, plodded hopelessly but pluckily in the rear. Here Clarissa strolled for some time, leaning on her husband's arm, and taking a very faint interest in the boats. It was a pretty sight, of course; but she had seen so many pretty sights lately, and the brightness of them had lost all power to charm her. She looked on, like a person in a picture-gallery, whose eyes and brain are dazed by looking at too many pictures. Mr. Granger noticed her listlessness, and was quick to take alarm. She was paler than usual, he thought.

'I'm afraid you've been overdoing it with so

many parties, Clary,' he said; 'you are looking quite tired to-day.'

'I am rather tired. I shall be glad to go back to Arden.'

'And I too, my dear. The fact is, there's nothing in the world I care less for than this sort of thing; but I wanted you to have all the enjoyment to be got out of a London season. It is only right that you should have any pleasure I can give you.'

'You are too good to me,' Clarissa answered with a faint sigh.

Her husband did not notice the sigh; but he did remark the phrase, which was one she had used very often—one that wounded him a little whenever he heard it.

'It is not a question of goodness, my dear,' he said. 'I love you, and I want to make you happy.'

Later in the afternoon, when the racing was at its height, and almost all Mr. Wooster's visitors had crowded to the terrace by the river, Clarissa strolled into one of the shrubbery walks, quite alone. It was after luncheon; and the rattle of plates and glasses, and the confusion of tongues that had obtained during the banquet, had increased the nervous headache with which she had begun the day. This grove of shining

laurel and arbutus was remote from the river, and as solitary just now as if Mr. Wooster's hundred or so of guests had been miles away. There were rustic benches here and there; and Clarissa seated herself upon one of them, which was agreeably placed in a recess amongst the greenery. She was more than usually depressed to-day, and no longer able to maintain that artificial vivacity by which she had contrived to conceal her depression. Her sin had found her out. The loveless union, entered upon so lightly, was beginning to weigh her down, as if the impalpable tie that bound her to her husband had been the iron chain that links a galley-slave to his companion.

'I have been very wicked,' she said to herself; 'and he is so good to me! If I could only teach myself to love him.'

She knew now that the weakness which had made her so plastic a creature in her father's hands had been an injustice to her husband; that it was not herself only she had been bound to consider in this matter. It was one thing to fling away her own chances of happiness; but it was another thing to jeopardise the peace of the man she married.

She was meditating on these things with a hopeless sense of confusion—a sense that her married life

was like some dreadful labyrinth, into which she had strayed unawares, and from which there was no hope of escape—when she was startled by an approaching footstep, and, looking up suddenly, saw George Fairfax coming slowly towards her, just as she had seen him in Marley Wood that summer day. How far away from her that day seemed now!

They had not met since that night in the orchard, nearly two years ago. She felt her face changing from pale to burning red, and then growing pale again. But by a great effort she was able to answer him in a steady voice presently when he spoke to her.

'What a happiness to see you again, my dear Mrs. Granger!' he said in his lightest tone, dropping quietly down into the seat by her side. 'I was told you were to be here to-day, or I should not have come; I am so heartily sick of all this kind of thing. But I really wanted to see you.'

'You were not at the luncheon, were you?' asked Clarissa, feeling that she must say something, and not knowing what to say.

'No; I have only been here half an hour or so. I hunted for you amongst that gaping crowd by the river, and then began a circuit of the grounds. I

have been lucky enough to find you without going very far. I have some news for you, Mrs. Granger.'

'News for me?'

'Yes; about your brother—about Mr. Austin Lovel.'

That name banished every other thought. She turned to the speaker eagerly.

'News of him—of my dear Austin? O, thank you a thousand times, Mr. Fairfax! Have you heard where he is, and what he is doing? Pray, pray tell me quickly!' she said, tremulous with excitement.

'I have done more than that: I have seen him.'

'In England—in London?' cried Clarissa, making a little movement as if she would have gone that moment to find him.

'No, not in England. Pray take things quietly, my dear Mrs. Granger. I have a good deal to tell you, if you will only listen calmly.'

'Tell me first that my brother is well—and happy, and then I will listen patiently to everything.'

'I think I may venture to say that he is tolerably well; but his happiness is a fact I cannot vouch for. If he does find himself in a condition so unusual to mankind, he is a very lucky fellow. I never

met a man yet who owned to being happy; and my own experience of life has afforded me only some few brief hours of perfect happiness.'

He looked at her with a smile that said as plainly as the plainest words, 'And those were when I was with you, Clarissa.'

She noticed neither the look nor the words that went before it. She was thinking of her brother, and of him only.

'But you have seen him,' she said. 'If he is not in England, he must be very near—in Paris perhaps. I heard you were in Paris.'

'Yes; it was in Paris that I saw him.'

'So near! O, thank God I shall see my brother again. Tell me everything about him, Mr. Fairfax —everything.'

'I will. It is best you should have a plain unvarnished account. You remember the promise I made you at Hale? Well, I tried my utmost to keep that promise. I hunted up the man I spoke of—a man who had been an associate of your brother's; but, unluckily, there had been no correspondence between them after Mr. Lovel went abroad; in short, he could tell me nothing—not even where your brother went. He had only a vague idea that

it was somewhere in Australia. So, you see, I was quite at a standstill here. I made several attempts in other directions, but all with the same result; and at last I gave up all hope of ever being of any use to you in this business.'

'You were very kind to take so much trouble.'

'I felt quite ashamed of my failure; I feel almost as much ashamed of my success; for it was perfectly accidental. I was looking at some water-coloured sketches in a friend's rooms in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré—sketches of military life, caricatures full of dash and humour, in a style that was quite out of the common way, and which yet seemed in some manner familiar to me. My friend saw that I admired the things. "They are my latest acquisitions in the way of art," he said; "they are done by a poor fellow who lives in a shabby third-floor near the Luxembourg—an Englishman called Austin. If you admire them so much, you might as well order a set of them. It would be almost an act of charity." The name struck me at once—your brother's Christian name; and then I remembered that I had been shown some caricature portraits which he had done of his brother-officers—things exactly in the style of the sketches I had been looking at. I asked for this

Mr. Austin's address, and drove off at once to find him, with a few lines of introduction from my friend. "The man is proud," he said, "though he carries his poverty lightly enough."'

'Poor Austin!' sighed Clarissa.

'I need not weary you with minute details. I found this Mr. Austin, and at once recognised your brother; though he is much altered—very much altered. He did not know me until afterwards, when I told him my name, and recalled our acquaintance. There was every sign of poverty: he looked worn and haggard; his clothes were shabby; his painting-room was the common sitting-room; his wife was seated by the open window patching a child's frock; his two children were playing about the room.'

'He is married, then? I did not even know that.'

'Yes, he is married; and I could see at a glance that an unequal marriage has been one among the causes of his ruin. The woman is well enough—pretty, with a kind of vulgar prettiness, and evidently fond of him. But such a marriage is moral death for any man. I contrived to get a little talk with him alone—told him of my acquaintance with

you, and of the promise that I had made to you. His manner had been all gaiety and lightness until then; but at the mention of your name he fairly broke down. "Tell her that I have never ceased to love her," he said; "tell her there are times when I dare not think of her."'

'He has not forgotten me, then. But pray go on; tell me everything.'

'There is not much more to tell. He gave me a brief sketch of his adventures since he sold out. Fortune had gone against him. He went to Melbourne, soon after his marriage, which he confessed was the chief cause of his quarrel with his father; but in Melbourne, as in every other Australian city to which he pushed his way, he found art at a discount. It was the old story: the employers of labour wanted skilled mechanics or stalwart navigators; there was no field for a gentleman or a genius. Your brother and his wife just escaped starvation in the new world, and just contrived to pay their way back to the old world. There were reasons why he should not show himself in England, so he shipped himself and his family in a French vessel bound for Havre, and came straight on to Paris, where he told me he found it tolerably easy to get employment for

his pencil. "I give a few lessons," he said, "and work for a dealer; and by that means we just contrive to live. We dine every day, and I have a decent coat, though you don't happen to find me in it. I can only afford to wear it when I go to my pupils. It is from-hand-to-mouth work; and if any illness should strike me down, the wife and little ones must starve."'

'Poor fellow! poor fellow! Did you tell him that I was rich, that I could help him?'

'Yes,' answered Mr. Fairfax, with an unmistakable bitterness in his tone; 'I told him that you had married the rich Mr. Granger.'

'How can I best assist him?' asked Clarissa eagerly. 'Every penny I have in the world is at his disposal. I can give him three or four hundred a year. I have five hundred quite in my own control, and need not spend more than one. I have been rather extravagant since my marriage, and have not much money by me just now, but I shall economise from henceforward; and I do not mind asking Mr. Granger to help my brother.'

'If you will condescend to take my advice, you will do nothing of that kind. Even my small knowledge of your brother's character is sufficient to make

me very certain that an appeal to Mr. Granger is just the very last thing to be attempted in this case.'

'But why so? my husband is one of the most generous men in the world, I think.'

'To you, perhaps, that is very natural. To a man of Mr. Granger's wealth a few thousands more or less are not worth consideration; but where there is a principle or a prejudice at stake, that kind of man is apt to tighten his purse-strings with a merciless hand. You would not like to run the risk of a refusal?' '

'I do not think there is any fear of that.'

'Possibly not; but there is your brother to be considered in this matter. Do you think it would be pleasant for him to know that his necessities were exposed to such a—to a brother-in-law whom he had never seen?'

'I do not know,' said Clarissa thoughtfully; 'I fancied that he would be glad of any helping hand that would extricate him from his difficulties. I should be so glad to see him restored to his proper position in the world.'

'My dear Mrs. Granger, it is better not to think of that. There is a kind of morass from which no

man can be extricated. I believe your brother has sunk into that lower world of Bohemianism from which a man rarely cares to emerge. The denizens of that nethermost circle lose their liking for the upper air, can scarcely breathe it, in fact. No, upon my word, I would not try to rehabilitate him; least of all through the generosity of Mr. Granger.'

'If I could only see him,' said Clarissa despondingly.

'I doubt whether he would come to England, even for the happiness of seeing you. If you were in Paris, now, I daresay it might be managed. We could bring about a meeting. But I feel quite sure that your brother would not care to make himself known to Mr. Granger, or to meet your father. There is a deadly feud between those two; and I should think it likely Mr. Lovel has prejudiced your husband against his son.'

Clarissa was fain to admit that it was so. More than once she had ventured to speak of her brother to Daniel Granger, and on each occasion had quickly perceived that her husband had some fixed opinion about Austin, and was inclined to regard her love for him as an amiable weakness that should be as far as possible discouraged.

'Your father has told me the story of his disagreement with his son, my dear Clarissa,' Daniel Granger had said in his gravest tone, 'and after what I have heard, I can but think it would be infinitely wise in you to forget that you ever had a brother.'

This was hard; and Clarissa felt her husband's want of sympathy in this matter as keenly as she could have felt any overt act of unkindness.

'Will you give me Austin's address?' she asked, after a thoughtful pause. 'I can write to him, at least, and send him some money, without consulting any one. I have about thirty pounds left of my last quarter's money, and even that may be of use to him.'

'Most decidedly. The poor fellow told me he had been glad to get ten napoleons for half a dozen sketches: more than a fortnight's hard work. Would it not be better, by the way, for you to send your letter to me, and allow me to forward it to your brother? and if you would like to send him fifty pounds, or a hundred, I shall be only too proud to be your banker.'

Clarissa blushed crimson, remembering that scene in the orchard, and her baffled lover's menaces. Had

he forgiven her altogether, and was this kind interest in her affairs an unconscious heaping of coals of fire on her head? Had he forgiven her so easily? Again she argued with herself, as she had so often argued before, that his love had never been more than a truant fancy, a transient folly, the merest vagabondage of an idle brain.

'You are very good,' she said, with a tinge of hauteur, 'but I could not think of borrowing money, even to help my brother. If you will kindly tell me the best method of remitting money to Paris.'

Here, Mr. Fairfax said, there was a difficulty; it ought to be remitted through a banker, and Mrs. Granger might find this troublesome to arrange, unless she had an account of her own.

Clarissa said she had no account, but met the objection by suggesting bank notes; and Mr. Fairfax was compelled to own that notes upon the Bank of England could be converted into French coin at any Parisian money-changer's.

He gave Clarissa the address, 13 Rue du Chevalier Bayard, near the Luxembourg.

'I will write to him to-night,' she said, and then rose from the rustic bench among the laurels. 'I think I must go and look for my husband now. I

left him some time ago on account of a headache. I wanted to get away from the noise and confusion on the river-bank.'

'Is it wise to return to the noise and confusion so soon?' asked Mr. Fairfax, who had no idea of bringing this interview to so sudden a close.

He had been waiting for such a meeting for a long time; waiting with a kind of sullen patience, knowing that it must come sooner or later, without any special effort of his; waiting with a strange mixture of feelings and sentiments—disappointed passion, wounded pride, mortified vanity, an angry sense of wrong that had been done to him by Clarissa's marriage, an eager desire to see her again, which was half a lover's yearning, half an enemy's lust of vengeance.

He was not a good man. Such a life as he had led is a life that no man can lead with impunity. To say that he might still be capable of a generous action or unselfish impulse, would be to say much for him, given the history of his manhood. A great preacher of to-day has declared, that he could never believe the man who said he had never been tempted. For George Fairfax life had been crowded with temptations; and he had not made even the feeblest stand

against the tempter. He had been an eminently fortunate man in all the trifles which make up the sum of a frivolous existence; and though his successes had been for the most part small social triumphs, they had not been the less agreeable. He had never felt the sting of failure until he stood in the Yorkshire orchard that chill October evening, and pleaded in vain to Clarissa Lovel. She was little more than a schoolgirl, and she rejected him. It was as if Lauzun, after having played fast-and-loose with that eldest daughter of France who was afterwards his wife, had been flouted by some milliner's apprentice, or made light of by an obscure little soubrette in Molière's troop of comedians. He had neither forgotten nor forgiven this slight; and mingled with that blind unreasoning passion, which he had striven in vain to conquer, there was an ever-present sense of anger and wrong.

When Clarissa rose from the bench, he rose too, and laid his hand lightly on her arm with a detaining gesture.

'If you knew how long I have been wishing for this meeting, you would not be so anxious to bring it to a close,' he said earnestly.

'It was very good of you to wish to tell me about

poor Austin,' she said, pretending to misunderstand him, 'and I am really grateful. But I must not stay any longer away from my party.'

'Clarissa—a thousand pardons—Mrs. Granger—' there is no describing the expression he gave to the utterance of that last name—a veiled contempt and aversion that just stopped short of actual insolence, because it seemed involuntary—'why are you so hard upon me? You have confessed that you wanted to escape the noise yonder, and yet to avoid me you would go back to that. Am I so utterly obnoxious to you?'

'You are not at all obnoxious to me; but I am really anxious to rejoin my party. My husband will begin to wonder what has become of me. Ah, there is my stepdaughter coming to look for me.'

Yes, there was Miss Granger, slowly advancing towards them. She had been quite in time to see George Fairfax's entreating gestures, his pleading air. She approached them with a countenance that would have been quite as appropriate to a genteel funeral—where any outward demonstration of grief would be in bad taste—as it was to Mr. Wooster's fête, a countenance expressive of a kind of dismal resignation to the burden of existence in a world that was unworthy of her.

'I was just coming back to the river, Sophia,' Mrs. Granger said, not without some faint indications of embarrassment. 'I'm afraid Mr.—I'm afraid Daniel must have been looking for me.'

'Papa *has* been looking for you,' Miss Granger replied, with unrelenting stiffness.—'How do you do, Mr. Fairfax?' shaking hands with him in a frigid manner.—'He quite lost the last race. When I saw that he was growing really anxious, I suggested that he should go one way, and I the other, in search of you. That is what brought me here.'

It was as much as to say, Pray understand that I have no personal interest in your movements.

'And yet I have not been so very long away,' Clarissa said, with a deprecating smile.

'You may not have been conscious of the lapse of time. You have been long. You said you would go and rest for a quarter of an hour or so; and you have been resting more than an hour.'

'I don't remember saying that; but you are always so correct, Sophia.'

'I make a point of being exact in small things. We had better go round the garden to look for papa. —Good-afternoon, Mr. Fairfax.'

'Good-afternoon, Miss Granger.'

George Fairfax shook hands with Clarissa.

'Good-bye, Mrs. Granger.'

That was all, but the words were accompanied by a look and a pressure of the hand that brought the warm blood into Clarissa's cheeks. She had made for herself that worst enemy a woman can have—a disappointed lover.

While they were shaking hands, Mr. Granger came in sight at the other end of the walk; so it was only natural that Mr. Fairfax, who had been tolerably intimate with him at Hale Castle, should advance to meet him. There were the usual salutations between the two men, exchanged with that stereotyped air of heartiness which seems common to Englishmen.

'I think we had better get home by the next train, Clarissa,' said Mr. Granger; '5.50. I told them to have the brougham ready for us at Paddington from half-past six.'

'I am quite ready to go,' Clarissa said.

'Your headache is better, I hope.'

'Yes; I had almost forgotten it.'

Miss Granger gave an audible sniff, which did not escape George Fairfax.

'What! suspicions already?' he said to himself.

'You may as well come and dine with us, Mr. Fairfax, if you have nothing better to do,' said Mr. Granger, with his lofty air, as much as to say, 'I suppose I ought to be civil to this young man.'

'It is quite impossible that I could have anything better to do,' replied Mr. Fairfax.

'In that case, if you will kindly give your arm to my daughter, we'll move off at once. I have wished Mr. Wooster good-afternoon on your part, Clary. I suppose we may as well walk to the station.'

'If you please.'

And in this manner they departed, Miss Granger just touching George Fairfax's coat-sleeve with the tips of her carefully-gloved fingers; Clarissa and her husband walking before them, arm in arm. Mr. Fairfax did his utmost to make himself agreeable during that short walk to the station; so much so that Sophia unbent considerably, and was good enough to inform him of her distaste for these frivolous pleasures, and of her wonder that other people could go on from year to year with an appearance of enjoyment.

'I really don't see what else one can do with one's life, Miss Granger,' her companion answered lightly. 'Of course, if a man had the genius of a Beethoven,

or a Goethe, or a Michael Angelo—or if he were "a heaven-born general," like Clive, it would be different; he would have some purpose and motive in his existence. But for the ruck of humanity, what can they do but enjoy life, after their lights?'

If all the most noxious opinions of Voltaire, and the rest of the Encyclopedists, had been expressed in one sentence, Miss Granger could not have looked more horrified than she did on hearing this careless remark of Mr. Fairfax's.

She gave a little involuntary shudder, and wished that George Fairfax had been one of the model children, so that she might have set him to learn the first five chapters in the first book of Chronicles, and thus poured the light of what she called Biblical knowledge upon his benighted mind.

'I do not consider the destiny of a Michael Angelo or a Goethe to be envied,' she said solemnly. 'Our lives are given us for something better than painting pictures or writing poems.'

'Perhaps; and yet I have read somewhere that St. Luke was a painter,' returned George Fairfax.

'Read somewhere,' was too vague a phrase for Miss Granger's approval.

'I am not one of those who set much value on

tradition,' she said with increased severity. 'It has been the favourite armour of our adversaries.'

'Our adversaries?'

'Yes, Mr. Fairfax. Of ROME!'

Happily for George Fairfax, they were by this time very near the station. Mr. and Mrs. Granger had walked before them, and Mr. Fairfax had been watching the tall slender figure by the manufacturer's side, not ill-pleased to perceive that those two found very little to say to each other during the walk. In the railway-carriage, presently, he had the seat opposite Clarissa, and was able to talk to her as much as he liked; for Mr. Granger, tired with staring after swift-flashing boats in the open sunshine, leaned his head back against the cushions and calmly slumbered. The situation reminded Mr. Fairfax of his first meeting with Clarissa. But she was altered since then; that charming air of girlish candour, which he had found so fascinating, had now given place to a womanly self-possession that puzzled him not a little. He could make no headway against that calm reserve, which was yet not ungracious. He felt that from first to last in this business he had been a fool. He had shown his cards in his anger, and Clarissa had taken alarm.

He was something less than a deliberate villain: but he loved her; he loved her, and until now fate had always given him the thing that he cared for. Honest Daniel Granger, sleeping the sleep of innocence, seemed to him nothing more than a gigantic stumbling-block in his way. He was utterly reckless of consequences—of harm done to others, above all—just as his father had been before him. Clarissa's rejection had aroused the worst attributes of his nature—an obstinate will, a boundless contempt for any human creature not exactly of his own stamp—for that prosperous trader, Daniel Granger, for instance—and a pride that verged upon the diabolic.

So, during that brief express journey, he sat talking gaily enough to Clarissa about the Parisian opera-houses, the last new plays at the Gymnase and the Odéon, the May races at Chantilly, and so on; yet hatching his grand scheme all the while. It had taken no definite shape as yet, but it filled his mind none the less.

'Strange that this fellow Granger should have been civil,' he said to himself. 'But that kind of man generally contrives to aid and abet his own destruction.

And then he glanced at this fellow Granger, sleep-

ing peacefully with his head in an angle of the carriage, and made a contemptuous comparison between himself and the millionaire. Mr. Granger had been all very well in the abstract, before he became an obstacle in the path of George Fairfax. But things were altered now, and Mr. Fairfax scrutinised him with the eyes of an enemy.

The dinner in Clarges-street was a very quiet affair. George Fairfax was the only visitor, and the Grangers were 'due' at an evening party. He learned with considerable annoyance that they were to leave London at the end of that week, whereby he could have little opportunity of seeing Clarissa. He might have followed her down to Yorkshire, certainly; but such a course would have been open to remark, nor would it be good taste for him to show himself in the neighbourhood of Hale Castle while Geraldine Challoner was there. He had an opportunity of talking confidentially to Clarissa once after dinner, when Mr. Granger, who had not fairly finished his nap in the railway-carriage, had retired to a dusky corner of the drawing-room and sunk anew into slumber, and when Miss Granger seemed closely occupied in the manufacture of an embroidered pincushion for a fancy fair. Absorbing as the manipulation of chenille and beads

might be, however, her work did not prevent her keeping a tolerably sharp watch upon those two figures by the open piano: Clarissa with one hand wandering idly over the keys, playing some random passage, *pianissimo*, now and then; George Fairfax standing by the angle of the piano, bending down to talk to her with an extreme earnestness.

He had his opportunity, and he knew how to improve it. He was talking of her brother. That subject made a link between them that nothing else could have made. She forgot her distrust of George Fairfax when he spoke with friendly interest of Austin.

'Is the wife *very* vulgar?' Clarissa asked, when they had been talking some time.

'Not so especially vulgar. That sort of thing would be naturally toned down by her association with your brother. But she has an unmistakable air of Bohemianism; looks like a third-rate actress, or dancer, in short; or perhaps an artist's model. I should not wonder if that were her position, by the way, when your brother fell in love with her. She is handsome still, though a little faded and worn by her troubles, poor soul! and seems fond of him.'

'I am glad of that. How I should like to see him, and the poor wife, and the children—my brother's

children! I have never had any children fond of me.'

She thought of Austin in his natural position, as the heir of Arden Court, with his children playing in the old rooms—not as they were now, in the restored splendour of the Middle Ages, but as they had been in her childhood, sombre and faded, with here and there a remnant of former grandeur.

Mr. Granger woke presently, and George Fairfax wished him good-night.

'I hope we shall see you at the Court some day,' Clarissa's husband said, with a kind of stately cordiality. 'We cannot offer you the numerous attractions of Hale Castle, but we have good shooting, and we generally have a houseful in September and October.'

'I shall be most happy to make one of the houseful,' Mr. Fairfax said, with a smile—that winning smile which had helped him to make so many friends, and which meant so little. He went away in a thoughtful spirit.

'Is she happy?' he asked himself. 'She does not seem unhappy; but then women have such a marvellous power of repression, or dissimulation, one can never be sure of anything about them. At Hale I

could have sworn that she loved me. Could a girl of that age be absolutely mercenary, and be caught at once by the prospect of bringing down such big game as Daniel Granger? Has she sold herself for a fine house and a great fortune, and is she satisfied with the price? Surely no. She is not the sort of woman to be made happy by splendid furniture and fine dresses; no, nor by the common round of fashionable pleasures. There was sadness in her face when I came upon her unawares to-day. Yes, I am sure of that. But she has schooled herself to hide her feelings.'

'I wonder you asked Mr. Fairfax to Arden, papa,' said Miss Granger, when the visitor had departed.

'Why, my dear? He is a very pleasant young man; and I know he likes our part of the country. Besides, I suppose he will be a good deal at Hale this year, and that his marriage will come off before long. Lord Calderwood must have been dead a year.'

'Lord Calderwood has been dead nearly two years,' replied Miss Granger. 'I fancy that engagement between Mr. Fairfax and Lady Geraldine must have been broken off. If it were not so, they would surely have been married before now. And I observed that Mr.

Fairfax was not with Lady Laura to-day. I do not know how long he may have been in the gardens,' Miss Granger added, with a suspicious glance at her stepmother, 'but he certainly was not with Lady Laura during any part of the time.'

Clarissa blushed when Lady Geraldine's engagement was spoken of. She felt as if she had been in some manner guilty in not having communicated the intelligence Lady Laura had given her. It seemed awkward to have to speak of it now.

'Yes,' she said, with a very poor attempt at carelessness, 'the engagement is broken off. Lady Laura told me so some time ago.'

'Indeed!' exclaimed Sophia. 'How odd that you should not mention it!'

Daniel Granger looked first at his daughter, and then at his wife. There was something in this talk, a sort of semi-significance, that displeased him. What was George Fairfax, that either his wife or his daughter should be interested in him?

'Clarissa may not have thought the fact worth mentioning, my dear,' he said stiffly. 'It is quite unimportant to us.'

He waved the subject away, as he might have done if it had been some small operation in commerce

altogether unworthy of his notice; but in his secret heart he kept the memory of his wife's embarrassed manner. He had not forgotten the portfolio of drawings among which the likeness of George Fairfax figured so prominently. It had seemed a small thing at the time—the merest accident; one head was as good to draw as another, and so on—he had told himself; but he knew now that his wife did not love him, and he wanted to know if she had ever loved any one else.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HEIR OF ARDEN.

Clarissa wrote to her brother—a long letter, full of warmth and tenderness, with loving messages for his children, and even for the wife who was so much beneath him. She enclosed three ten-pound notes, all that remained to her of a quarter's pin-money; and O, how bitterly she regretted the frivolous extravagances that had reduced her exchequer to so low a condition! Towards the close of her letter she came to a standstill. She had begged Austin to write to her, to tell her all he could about himself, his hopes, his plans for the future; but when it came to the question of receiving a letter from him she was puzzled. From the first day of her married life she had made a point of showing all her letters to her husband, as a duty, just as she had shown them to her father; who had very rarely taken the trouble to read them, by the way. But Daniel Granger did read his

wife's letters, and expected that they should be submitted to him. It would be impossible to reserve from him any correspondence that came to her in the common way. So Clarissa, though not given to secrecy, was on this occasion fain to be secret. After considerable deliberation, she told her brother to write to her under cover to her maid, Jane Target, at Arden Court. The girl seemed a good honest girl, and Mrs. Granger believed that she could trust her.

They went back to Arden a day or two afterwards; and Miss Granger returned with rapture to her duties as commander-in-chief of the model villagers. No martinet ever struck more terror into the breasts of rank and file than did this young lady cause in the simple minds of her prize cottagers, conscience-stricken by the knowledge that stray cobwebs had flourished and dust-bins run to seed during her absence. There was not much room for complaint, however, when she did arrive. The note of warning had been sounded by the servants of the Court, and there had been a general scrubbing and cleansing in the habitations of New Arden—that particular Arden which Mr. Granger had built for himself, and the very bricks whereof ought to have been stamped with his name and titles, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar,

king of Babylon. For a week before Miss Granger's coming there had been heard the splashing of innumerable pails of water, and the scrubbing of perpetual scrubbing-brushes; windows had been polished to the highest degree of transparency; tin tea-kettles had been sandpapered until they became as silver; there had been quite a run upon the village chandler for mottled soap and hearthstone.

So, after a rigorous inspection, Miss Granger was obliged to express her approval—not an unqualified approval, by any means. Too much praise would have demoralised the Ardenites, and lowered the standard of perfection.

'I like to be able to say that my papa's village is the cleanest village in England,' she said; 'not one of the cleanest, but *the* cleanest. Why have you turned the back of that tea-kettle to the wall, Mrs. Binks? I'm afraid it's smoky. Now there never need be a smoky kettle. Your place looks very nice, Mrs. Binks; but from the strong smell of soap, I fancy it must have been cleaned *very lately*. I hope you have not been neglecting things while I've been away. That sort of thing would militate against your obtaining my prize for domestic cleanliness next Christmas.'

Mrs. Binks did not know what 'militate' meant, unless it might be something in connection with the church militant, of which she had heard a great deal; but she was not a mild-tempered woman, and she grew very red in the face at this reproof.

'Well, miss, if to toil and scrub early and late, with a husband and five children to do for, and to keep the place pretty much as you see it now, though I don't say as it ain't a little extry perhaps, in honour of your coming back—if that ain't hard work and cleanliness, and don't deserve a prize of two pound at the year's end, I don't know what do. It's hard-earned money, Miss Granger, when all's said and done.'

Sophia turned the eyes of reproof upon Mrs. Binks.

'I did not think it was the money you cared for,' she said; 'I thought it was the honour you valued most.'

She pointed to a card framed and glazed over the mantelpiece—a card upon which, with many flourishes and fat initial letters in red ink, the model schoolmaster had recorded the fact, that Mrs. Binks, at the preceding Christmas distributions, had obtained Miss Granger's annual reward for domestic cleanliness.

'Well, of course, miss, I set store by the card. It's nice to see one's name wrote out like that, and any strangers as chance to come in the summer time, they takes notice; but to a hard-working man's wife two pound is a consideration. I'm sure I beg your parding humbly, miss, if I spoke a bit short just now; but it is trying, when one has worked hard, to have one's work found fault with.'

'I am not aware that I found fault with your work, Mrs. Binks,' Sophia replied with supreme dignity; 'I merely remarked that it appeared to have been done hastily. I don't approve of spasmodic industry.'

And with this last crushing remark, Miss Granger sailed out of the cottage, leaving the luckless Mrs. Binks to repent her presumption at leisure, and to feel that she had hazarded her hopes of Christmas bounties, and enhanced the chances of her detested rival of three doors off, Mrs. Trotter, a sanctimonious widow, with three superhuman children, who never had so much as a spot on their pinafores, and were far in advance of the young Binkses in Kings and Chronicles; indeed, the youngest Trotter had been familiar with all the works of Hezekiah before the eldest Binks had grasped the abstract idea of Saul.

For Clarissa the change to Arden Court was a pleasant one. That incessant succession of London gaieties had wearied her beyond measure. Here, for a little time before her visitors began to arrive, she lived her own life, dreaming away a morning over her sketch-book, or reading some newly-published volume in a favourite thicket in the park. There was a good deal of time, of course, that she was obliged to devote to her husband, walking or driving or riding with him, in rather a ceremonial manner, almost as she might have done had she belonged to that charmed circle whose smallest walk or drive is recorded by obsequious chroniclers in every journal in the united kingdom. Then came six brilliant weeks in August and September, when Arden Court was filled with visitors, and Clarissa began to feel how onerous are the duties of a châtelaine. She had not Lady Laura Armstrong's delight in managing a great house. She was sincerely anxious that her guests might be pleased, but somewhat overburdened by the responsibility of pleasing them. It was only after some experience that she found there was very little to be done, after all. With a skilful combination of elements, the result was sure to be agreeable. Morning after morning the cheerful faces gathered

round the breakfast-table; and morning after morning vast supplies of dried salmon, fresh trout, grilled fowl, and raised pie—to say nothing of lighter provender, in the way of omelets, new-laid eggs, hot buttered cakes of various descriptions, huge wedges of honeycomb, and jars of that Scotch marmalade, so dear to the hearts of boating-men—vanished like smoke before a whirlwind. Whatever troubles these nomads may have had were hidden in their hearts for the time being. A wise custom prevailed in Mr. Granger's establishment with regard to the morning letters, which were dealt out to each guest with his or her early cup of tea, and not kept back for public distribution, to the confusion of some luckless recipient, who feels it difficult to maintain an agreeable smirk upon his countenance while he reads, that unless such or such an account is settled immediately, proceedings will be taken without delay.

Lady Laura came, as she had promised, and gave her dearest Clarissa lessons in the art of presiding over a large establishment, and did her utmost to oust Miss Granger from her position of authority in the giving out of stores and the ordering of grocery. This, however, was impossible. Sophia clung to her grocer's book as some unpopular monarch tottering

on his insecure throne might cling to his sceptre. If she could not sit in the post of honour at her father's dinner-table, as she had sat so long, it was something to reign supreme in the store-room; if she found herself a secondary person in the drawing-room, and that unpunctilious callers were apt to forget the particular card due to her, she could at least hold on by the keys of those closets in which the superfine china services for Mr. Granger's great dinners were stored away, with chamois leather between all the plates and dishes. She had still the whip-hand of the housekeeper, and could ordain how many French plums and how many muscatel raisins were to be consumed in a given period. She could bring her powers of arithmetic to bear upon wax-candles, and torment the souls of hapless underlings by the precision of her calculations. She had an eye to the preserves; and if awakened suddenly in the dead of the night could have told, to a jar, how many pots of strawberry, and raspberry, and currant, and greengage were ranged on the capacious shelves of that stronghold of her power, the store-room.

Even Lady Laura's diplomacy failed here. The genius of a Talleyrand would not have dislodged Miss Granger.

'I like to feel that I am of *some* use to papa,' she remarked very often, with the air of a household Antigone. 'He has new outlets for his money now, and it is more than ever my duty as a daughter to protect him from the wastefulness of servants. With all my care, there are some things in Mrs. Plumptree's management which I do not understand. I'm sure what becomes of all the preserved-ginger and crystallised apricots that I give out, is a mystery that no one could fathom. Who ever eats preserved-ginger? I have taken particular notice, and could never see any one doing it. The things are not eaten; *they disappear*.'

Lady Laura suggested that, with such a fortune as Mr. Granger's, a little waste more or less was hardly worth thinking of.

'I cannot admit that,' Miss Granger replied solemnly. 'It is the abstract sinfulness of waste which I think of. An under-butler who begins by wasting preserved-ginger may end by stealing his master's plate.'

The summer went by. Picnics and boating parties, archery meetings and flower-shows, and all the familiar round of country pleasures repeated themselves just as they had done at Hale Castle two

years ago; and Clarissa wondered at the difference in her own mind which made these things so different. It was not that all capacity for enjoyment was dead in her. Youth is too bright a thing to be killed so easily. She could still delight in a lovely landscape, in exquisite flowers, in that art which she had loved from her childhood—she could still enjoy good music and pleasant society; but that keen sense of happiness which she had felt at Hale, that ardent appreciation of small pleasures, that eager looking forward to the future—these were gone. She lived in the present. To look back to the past was to recall the image of George Fairfax, who seemed somehow interwoven with her girlhood; to look forward to the future was to set her face towards a land hidden in clouds and darkness. She had positively nothing to hope for.

Mr. Granger took life very calmly. He knew that his wife did not love him; and he was too proud a man to lay himself out to win her love, even if he had known how to set about a task so incongruous with the experience of his life. He was angry with himself for having ever been weak enough to think that this girlish creature—between whom and himself there stretched a gulf of thirty years—could by any

possibility be beguiled into loving him. Of course, she had married him for his money. There was not one among his guests who would not have thought him a fool for supposing that it could be otherwise, or for expecting more from her than a graceful fulfilment of the duties of her position.

He had little ground for complaint. She was gentle and obedient, deferential in her manner to him before society, amiable always; he only knew that she did not love him—that was all. But Daniel Granger was a proud man, and this knowledge was a bitter thing to him. There were hours in his life when he sat alone in his own room—that plainly-furnished chamber which was half study, half dressing-room—withdrawing himself from his guests under pretence of having business-letters to write to his people at Bradford and Leeds; sat with his open desk before him, and made no attempt to write; sat brooding over thoughts of his young wife, and regretting the folly of his marriage.

Was it true that she had never cared for any one else? He had her father's word for that; but he knew that Marmaduke Lovel was a selfish man, who would be likely enough to say anything that would conduce to his own advantage. Had her heart been

really true and pure when he won her for his wife? He remembered those sketches of George Fairfax in the portfolio, and one day when he was waiting for Clarissa in her morning-room he took the trouble to look over her drawings. There were many that he recollected having seen that day at Mill Cottage, but the portraits of Mr. Fairfax were all gone. He looked through the portfolio very carefully, but found none of those careless yet life-like sketches which had attracted the attention of Sophia Granger.

'She has destroyed them, I suppose,' he said to himself; and the notion of her having done so annoyed him a little. He did not care to question her about them. There would have been an absurdity in that, he thought: as if it could matter to him whose face she chose for her unstudied sketches—mere vagabondage of the pencil.

Upon rare occasions Marmaduke Lovel consented to take a languid share in the festivities at Arden. But although he was very well pleased that his daughter should be mistress of the house that he had lost, he did not relish a secondary position in the halls of his forefathers; nor had the gaieties of the place any charm for him. He was glad to slip away quietly at the beginning of September, and to

go back to Spa, where the waters agreed with his rheumatism—that convenient rheumatism which was an excuse for anything he might choose to do.

As for his daughter, he washed his hands of all responsibility in connection with her. He felt as if he had provided for her in a most meritorious manner by the diplomacy which had brought about her marriage. Whether she was happy in her new life, was a question which he had never asked himself; but if any one else had propounded such a question, he would have replied unhesitatingly in the affirmative. Of course Clarissa was happy. Had she not secured for herself all the things that women most value? could she not run riot in the pleasures for which women will imperil their souls? He remembered his own wife's extravagance, and he argued with himself, that if she could have had a perennial supply of fine dresses, and a perpetual round of amusement, she would speedily have forgotten Colonel Fairfax. It was the dulness of her life, and the dismal atmosphere of poverty, that had made her false.

So he went back to Spa, secure in the thought that he could make his home at Arden whenever he pleased. Perhaps at some remote period of old age,

when his senses were growing dim, he might like to inhabit the familiar rooms, and feel no sting in the thought that he was a guest, and not the master. It would be rather pleasant to be carried to his grave from Arden Court, if anything about a man's burial could be pleasant. He went back to Spa and led his own life, and in a considerable measure forgot that he had ever had a son and a daughter.

With September and October there came guests for the shooting, but George Fairfax was not among them. Mr. Granger had not renewed that careless invitation of his in Clarges-street. After supervising Clarissa's existence for two or three weeks, Lady Laura had returned to Hale, there to reign in all her glory. Mr. and Mrs. Granger dined at the Castle twice in the course of the autumn, and Clarissa saw Lady Geraldine for the first time since that fatal wedding day.

There was very little alteration in the fair placid face. Geraldine Challoner was not a woman to wear the willow in any obvious manner. She was still coldly brilliant, with just a shade more bitterness, perhaps, in those little flashes of irony and cynicism which passed for wit. She talked rather more than of old, Clarissa thought; she was dressed more ela-

borately than in the days of her engagement to George Fairfax, and had altogether the air of a woman who means to shine in society. To Mrs. Granger she was polite, but as cold as was consistent with civility.

After a fortnight's slaughter of the pheasants, there was a lull in the dissipations of Arden Court. Visitors departed, leaving Mr. Granger's gamekeepers with a plethora of sovereigns and half-sovereigns in their corduroy pockets, and serious thoughts of the Holborough Savings Bank, and Mr. Granger's chief butler with views that soared as high as Consols. All the twitter and cheerful confusion of many voices in the rooms and corridors of the grand old house dwindled and died away, until Mr. Granger was left alone with his wife and daughter. He was not sorry to see his visitors depart, though he was a man who, after his own fashion, was fond of society. But before the winter was over, an event was to happen at Arden which rendered quiet indispensable.

Late in December, while the villagers were eating Mr. Granger's beef, and warming themselves before Mr. Granger's coals, and reaping the fruit of laborious days in the shape of Miss Granger's various premiums for humble virtue—while the park and

woodland were wrapped in snow, and the Christmas bells were still ringing in the clear crisp air, God gave Clarissa a son—the first thing she had ever held in her arms which she could and might love with all her heart.

It was like some strange dream to her, this holy mystery of motherhood. She had not looked forward to the child's coming with any supreme pleasure, or supposed that her life would be altered by his advent. But from the moment she held him in her arms, a helpless morsel of humanity, hardly visible to the uninitiated amidst his voluminous draperies, she felt herself on the threshold of a new existence. With him was born her future—it was a most complete realisation of those sweet wise words of the poet,

> 'a child, more than all other gifts
> That earth can offer to declining man,
> Brings hope with it, and forward looking thoughts.'

Mr. Granger was enraptured. For him, too, even more than for his wife, this baby represented the future. Often and often, after some brilliant stroke of business which swelled the figures upon the left side of his bank-book to an abnormal amount, he had felt a dismal sense of the extinction that must befall his glory by and by. There was no one but

Sophia. She would inherit a fortune thrice as large as any woman need desire, and would in all likelihood marry, and give her wealth to fill the coffers of a stranger, whose name should wipe out the name of Granger—or preserve it in a half-and-half way in some inane compound, such as Granger-Smith, or Jones-Granger, extended afterwards into Jones-Granger-Jones, or Granger-Smith-Granger.

Perhaps those wintry days that began the new year were the purest, happiest of Daniel Granger's life. He forgot that his wife did not love him. She seemed so much more his wife, seated opposite to him beside that quiet hearth, with her baby in her arms. She made such a lovely picture, bending over the child in her unconscious beauty. To sit and watch the two was an all-sufficient delight for him—sometimes withdrawing his mind from the present, to weave the web of his boy's future.

'I shall send him to Westminster, Clary,' he said—it was a long time, by the way, since he had called his wife Clary, though she herself was hardly aware of the fact. 'I shall certainly send him to Westminster. A provincial public school is all very well—my father sent me to one—but it's not *quite* up to the mark. I should like him to be a good classical

scholar, which I never was, though I was a decent mathematician. I used to do my Virgil with a crib —a translation, you know—and I never could get on with Greek. I managed to struggle through the New Testament, but stuck in the first book of Thucydides. What dreary work it was! I was glad when it was all over, and my father let me come into his office. But with this fellow it will be different. He will have no occasion to soil his hands with trade. He will be a country gentleman, and may distinguish himself in the House of Commons. Yes, Clary, there may be the material for a great man in him,' Mr. Granger concluded, with an almost triumphant air, as he touched the soft little cheek, and peered curiously into the bright blue eyes. They were something like his own eyes, he thought; Clarissa's were hazel.

The mother drew the soft mass of muslin a little nearer to her heart. She did not care to think of her baby as a man, addressing a noisy constituency in Holborough market-place, nor even as a Westminster boy, intent upon Virgil and cricket, Euclid and football. She liked to think of him as he was now, and as he would be for the next few years—something soft and warm and loving, that she could

hold in her arms; beside whose bed she could watch and pray at night. Her future was bounded by the years of her son's childhood. She thought already, with a vague pang, of the time when he should go out into the world, and she be no longer necessary to him.

The day came when she looked back to that interval of perfect quiet—the dimly-lighted rooms, the low wood fire, and her husband's figure seated by the hearth—with a bitter sense of regret. Daniel Granger was so good to her in those days—so entirely devoted, in a quiet unobtrusive way—and she was so selfishly absorbed by the baby as to be almost unconscious of his goodness at the time. She was inclined to forget that the child belonged to any one but herself; indeed, had the question been brought home to her, she would have hardly liked to admit his father's claim upon him. He was her own—her treasure beyond all price—given to her by heaven for her comfort and consolation.

Not the least among the tranquil pleasures of that period of retirement—which Clarissa spun out until the spring flowers were blooming in the meadows about Arden—was a comparative immunity from the society of Miss Granger. That young lady

made a dutiful call upon her stepmother every morning, and offered a chilling forefinger—rather a strong-minded forefinger, with a considerable development of bone—to the infant. On the child not receiving this advance with rapture, Miss Granger was wont to observe that he was not so forward in taking notice as some of her model children; at which the young mother flamed up in defence of her darling, declaring that he *did* take notice, and that it was a shame to compare him to 'nasty village children.'

'The "nasty village children" have immortal souls,' Sophia replied severely.

'So they may; but they don't take notice sooner than my baby. I would never believe that. He knows *me*, the precious darling;' and the little soft warm thing in voluminous muslin was kissed and squeezed about to extinction.

Miss Granger was great upon the management of infancy, and was never tired of expounding her ideas to Clarissa. They were of a Spartan character, not calculated to make the period of babyhood a pleasant time to experience or to look back upon. Cold water and nauseous medicines formed a conspicuous part of the system, and where an ordinary nurse

would have approached infancy with a sponge, Miss Granger suggested a flesh brush. The hardest, most impracticable biscuits, the huskiest rusks, constituted Miss Granger's notion of infant food. She would have excluded milk, as bilious, and would have forbidden sugar, as a creator of acidity; and then, when the little victim was about one and a half, she would have seated it before the most dry-as-dust edition of the alphabet, and driven it triumphantly upon the first stage on the high road to Kings and Chronicles.

Among the model villagers Miss Granger had ample opportunity of offering advice of this kind, and fondly believed that her counsel was acted upon. Obsequious matrons, with an eye to Christmas benefactions, pretended to profit by her wisdom; but it is doubtful whether the model infants were allowed to suffer from a practical exposition of her Spartan theories.

Clarissa had her own ideas about the heir of the Grangers. Not a crumpled rose-leaf—had rose-leaves been flying about just then—must roughen her darling's bed. The softest lawn, the downiest, most delicate woollens, were hardly good enough to wrap her treasure. She had solemn interviews with a

regiment of nurses before she could discover a woman who seemed worthy to be guardian of this infant demigod. And Mr. Granger showed himself scarcely less weak. It almost seemed as if this boy was his first child. He had been a busy man when Sophia was born—too entirely occupied by the grave considerations of commerce to enter into the details of the nursery—and the sex of the child had been something of a disappointment to him. He was rich enough even then to desire an heir to his wealth. During the few remaining years of his first wife's life, he had hoped for the coming of a son; but no son had been given to him. It was now, in his sober middle age, that the thing he had longed for was granted to him, and it seemed all the more precious because of the delay. So Daniel Granger was wont to sit and stare at the infant as if it had been something above the common clay of which infancy is made. He would gaze at it for an hour together, in a dumb rapture, fully believing it to be the most perfec object in creation; and about this child there sprung up between his wife and himself a sympathy that had never been before. Only deep in Clarissa's heart there was a vague jealousy. She would have liked her baby to be hers alone. The thought of

his father's claim frightened her. In the time to come her child might grow to love his father better than her.

Finding her counsel rejected, Miss Granger would ask in a meek voice if she might be permitted to kiss the baby, and having chilled his young blood by the cool and healthy condition of her complexion, would depart with an air of long-suffering; and this morning visit being over, Clarissa was free of her for the rest of the day. Miss Granger had her 'duties.' She devoted her mornings to the regulation of the household, her afternoons to the drilling of the model villagers. In the evening she presided at her father's dinner, which seemed rather a chilling repast to Mr. Granger, in the absence of that one beloved face. He would have liked to dine off a boiled fowl in his wife's room, or to have gone dinnerless and shared Clarissa's tea and toast, and heard the latest wonders performed by the baby, but he was ashamed to betray so much weakness.

So he dined in state with Sophia, and found it hard work to keep up a little commonplace conversation with her during the solemn meal — his heart being elsewhere all the time.

That phase of gloom and despondency, through

which his mind had passed during the summer that was gone, had given place to brighter thoughts. A new dawn of hope had come for him with the birth of his child.

He told himself again, as he had so often told himself in the past, that his wife would grow to love him—that time would bring him the fruition of his desires. In the mean while he was almost entirely happy in the possession of this new blessing. All his life was coloured by the existence of this infant. He had a new zest in the driest details of his position as the master of a great estate. He had bought some two thousand acres of neighbouring land at different times since his purchase of Arden Court; and the estate, swollen by these large additions, was fast becoming one of the finest in the county.

There was not a tree he planted in the beginning of this new year which he did not consider with reference to his boy; and he made extensive plantations on purpose that he might be able to point to them by and by and say, 'These trees were planted the year my son was born.' When he went round his stables, he made a special survey of one particularly commodious loose-box, which would do for his

boy's pony. He fancied the little fellow trotting by his side across farms and moorlands, or deep into the woods to see the newly-felled timber, or to plan a fresh clearing.

It was a pleasant day-dream.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEAREST WAY TO CARLSRUHE.

A GREAT event befell George Fairfax in the spring of the new year. He received a summons to Lyvedon, and arrived there only in time to attend his uncle's death-bed. The old man died, and was buried in the tomb of his forefathers—a spacious vaulted chamber beneath Lyvedon church—and George Fairfax reigned in his stead. Since his brother's death he had known that this was to be, and had accepted the fact as a matter of course. His succession caused him very little elation. He was glad to have unlimited ready-money, but, in the altered aspect of his life, he did not care much for the estate. With Geraldine Challoner for his wife, the possession of such a place as Lyvedon would have been very agreeable to him. He could have almost resigned himself to the ordinary country gentleman's life: to be a magnate in the county; to attend at petty sessions, and keep

himself well posted in parochial questions; to make himself a terror to the soul of poachers, and to feel that his youth was over. But now it was different. He had no wife, nor any prospect of a wife. He had no definite plans for his future. For a long time he had been going altogether the wrong way; leading a roving, desultory kind of existence; living amongst men whose habits and principles were worse than his own.

He sent for his mother, and installed her as mistress of Lyvedon. The place and the position suited her to admiration. He spent a month in dawdling about the neighbourhood, taking stock of his new possessions, now and then suggesting some alteration or improvement, but always too lazy to carry it out; strolling in the park with a couple of dogs and a cigar, or going fly-fishing along the bank of a little winding river; driving in an open carriage with his mother; yawning over a book or a newspaper all the evening, and then sitting up till late into the night, writing letters which might just as easily have been written in the day. His manner made his mother anxious. Once, with a sigh, she ventured to say how much she regretted the breaking-off his engagement to Lady Geraldine.

'You were so admirably adapted for each other,' she said.

'Yes, mother, admirably adapted, no doubt; but you see we did not love each other.' He felt a little pang of remorse as he said this, for it misgave him that Geraldine *had* loved him. 'It would have been like those chestnut ponies you drive; they go very well together, and look superb, but they are always snapping at each other's heads. I don't mean to say that Geraldine and I would have quarrelled—one might as well try to quarrel with a rock—but we shouldn't have got on. In short, I have a prejudice in favour of marrying a woman I could love.'

'And yet I thought you were so much attached to her.'

'I was—in the way of friendship. Her society had become a kind of habit with me. I do really like her, and shall always consider her one of the handsomest and cleverest women I know; but it was a mistake to ask her to marry me, and might have been a fatal one. You will say, of course, that a man ought not to make that kind of mistake. I quite agree with you there; but I made it, and I think it infinitely better to pull up even at an awkward point than to make two lives miserable.'

Mrs. Fairfax sighed, and shook her head doubtfully.

'O, George, George, I'm afraid there was some newer fancy — some secret reason for your conduct to poor Geraldine,' she said in a reproachful tone.

'My dear mother, I have a dozen fancies in a month, and rarely know my own mind for a week at a stretch; but I do know that I never really loved Geraldine Challoner, and that it is better for me to be free from an ill-advised engagement.'

Mrs. Fairfax did not venture to press the question any farther. She had her suspicions, and her suspicions pointed to Clarissa. But Clarissa now being married and fairly out of the way, she had some faint hope that her son would return to his old allegiance, and that she might even yet have Geraldine Challoner for her daughter. In the mean time she was fain to be patient, and to refrain from any irritating persistence upon a subject that was very near to her heart.

So far as her own interests were concerned, it would have been a pleasant thing for Mrs. Fairfax that her son should remain a bachelor. The sovereignty of Lyvedon was a pure and perfect delight to her. The place was the home of her childhood; and

there was not a thicket in the park, or a flower-bed in the garden, that was not familiar and dear to her. Every corner of the sombre old rooms—in which the furniture had been unchanged for a century—had its tender associations. All the hopes and dreams of her long-vanished youth came back to her, faint and pale, like faded flowers shut in the leaves of a book. And in the event of her son's marriage, she must of course resign all this—must make a new home for herself outside the walls of Lyvedon; for she was not a woman to accept a secondary place in any household. Considering the question merely from a selfish point of view, she had every reason to be satisfied with the existing state of things; but it was not of herself she thought. She saw her son restless and unsettled, and had a secret conviction that he was unhappy. There had been much in the history of his past life that had troubled her; and for his future her chief hope had been in the security of a judicious marriage. She was a woman of strong religious feeling, and had shed many bitter tears and prayed many prayers on account of this beloved son.

The beloved son in the mean while dawdled away life in a very unsatisfactory manner. He found the

roads and lanes about Lyvedon remarkable for nothing but their dust. There were wild flowers, of course—possibly nightingales and that sort of thing; but he preferred such imported bouquets, grown on the flowery slopes of the Mediterranean, as he could procure to order at Covent-garden; and the song of nightingales in the dusky after-dinner-time made him melancholy. The place was a fine old place, and it was undoubtedly a good thing to possess it; but George Fairfax had lived too wild a life to find happiness in the simple pleasures of a Kentish squire. So, after enduring the placid monotony of Lyvedon for a couple of months, he grew insufferably weary all at once, and told his mother that he was going to the Black Forest.

'It's too early to shoot capercailzies,' he said, 'but I daresay I shall find something to do. I am nothing but a bore to you here, mother; and you can amuse yourself, while I'm gone, in carrying out any of the improvements we've discussed.'

Mrs. Fairfax assured her son that his presence was always a delight to her, but that, of course, there was nothing in the world she desired so much as his happiness, and that it had been a pain to her to see him otherwise than happy.

'I had hoped that the possession of this place would have given you so much occupation,' she said, 'that you would have gone into parliament and made a position for yourself.'

'My dear mother, I never had any affection for politics; and unless a man could be a modern Pitt, I don't see the use of that kind of thing. Every young Englishman turns his face towards the House of Commons, as the sunflower turns to the sun-god; and see what a charming level of mediocrity we enjoy in consequence thereof.'

'Anything that would occupy your mind, George,' remonstrated Mrs. Fairfax.

'The question is, whether I have any mind to be occupied, mother,'. replied the young man with a laugh. 'I think the average modern intellect, when it knows its own capacity, rarely soars above billiards. That is a science; and what can a man be more than scientific?'

'It is so easy to laugh the subject down in that way, George,' returned the mother with a sigh. 'But a man has duties to perform.'

'Surely not a man with an estate like this, mother! I can never understand that talk about the duties of a rich man, except to pay his income-

tax properly. A fellow with a wife and children, and no income to speak of, has duties, of course—imprimis, the duty of working for his belongings; but what are the privileges of wealth, if one may not take life as one pleases?'

'O, George, George, I used to hope such great things of you!'

'The fond delusion common to maternity, my dearest mother. A brat learns his A B C a shade quicker than other children, or construes *Qui fit Mæcenas* with tolerable correctness; and straightway the doting mother thinks her lad is an embryo Canning. You should never have hoped anything of me, except that I would love you dearly all my life. You have made that very easy to me.'

Mr. Fairfax took his portmanteau and departed, leaving his servant to carry the rest of his luggage straight to Paris, and await his master's arrival at one of the hotels in the Rue de Rivoli. The master himself took a somewhat circuitous route, and began his journey to the Black Forest by going down to Holborough.

'I can take a steamer from Hull to Hamburg,' he said to himself, 'and push on from there to Carlsruhe.'

He wanted to see Clarissa again. He knew that she was at Arden Court, and that Lady Laura Armstrong was not at Hale Castle. He wanted to see her; his ulterior views were of the vaguest; but that passionate yearning to see her, to hear the sweet winning voice, to look into the soft hazel eyes, was strong upon him. It was a year since the day he dined in Clarges-street; and in all that year he had done his uttermost to forget her, had hated himself for the weakness which made her still dearer to him than any other woman; and then, alike angry with her and with himself, had cried, with Wilmot Earl of Rochester,

> 'Such charms by nature you possess,
> 'Twere madness not to love you.'

He went up to London early one morning, and straight from London to Holborough, where he arrived late in the evening. He slept at the chief inn of the place; and in the golden summer noontide set out for Arden Court—not to make a formal visit, but rather to look about him in a somewhat furtive way. He did not care to make his advent known to Daniel Granger just yet; perhaps, indeed, he might find it expedient to avoid any revelation of himself to that gentleman. He wanted to find out all he could of

Clarissa's habits, so that he might contrive an interview with her. He had seen the announcement of the baby's birth, and O, what a bitter pang the commonplace paragraph had given him! Never before had the fact that she was another man's wife come home to him so keenly. He tried to put the subject out of his thoughts, to forget that there had been a son born to the house of Granger; but often in the dreary spring twilight, walking among the oaks of Lyvedon, he had said to himself, '*Her* child ought to have been heir to this place.'

He went in at the lodge gate, and strolled idly into the park, not being at all clear as to how he was to bring about what he wanted. The weather was lovely—weather in which few people, untrammelled by necessity, would have cared to remain indoors. There was just the chance that Mrs. Granger might be strolling in the park herself, and the still more remote contingency that she might be alone. He was quite prepared for the possibility of meeting her accompanied by the lynx-eyed Miss Granger; and was not a man to be thrown off his guard or taken at a disadvantage, come what might.

The place wore its fairest aspect: avenues of elms, that had begun to grow when England was young;

gigantic oaks dotted here and there upon the undulating open ground, reputed a thousand years old; bright young plantations of rare fir and pine, that had a pert crisp newness about them, like the air of a modern dandy; everywhere the appearance of that perfect care and culture which is the most conclusive evidence of unlimited wealth.

George Fairfax looked round him with a sigh. The scene he looked upon was very fair. It was not difficult to understand how dear association might have made so beautiful a spot to such a girl as Clarissa. She had told him she would give the world to win back her lost home; and she had given—something less than the world—only herself. 'Paris is worth a mass,' said the great Henry; and Clarissa's perjury was only one more of the many lies which men and women have told to compass their desires.

He kept away from the carriage-roads, loitering in the remoter regions of the park, and considering what he should do. He did not want to present himself at the Court as a formal visitor. In the first place, it would have been rather difficult to give any adequate reason for his presence in Holborough; and in the second, he had an unspeakable

repugnance to any social intercourse with Clarissa's husband.

How he was ever to see her in the future without that hideous hypocrisy of friendliness towards Daniel Granger, he knew not; but he knew that it would cost him dearly to take the hand of the man who had supplanted him.

He wandered on till he came to a dell where the ground was broken a good deal, and where the fern seemed to grow more luxuriantly than in any other part of the park. There was a glimpse of blue water at the bottom of the slope — a narrow strip of a streamlet running between swampy banks, where the forget-me-nots and pale water-plants ran riot. This verdant valley was sheltered by some of the oldest hawthorns George Fairfax had ever seen—very Methuselahs of trees, whose grim old trunks and crooked branches time had twisted into the queerest shapes, and whose massive boles and strange excrescences of limb were covered with the moss of past generations. It was such a valley as Gustave Doré would love to draw; a glimpse of wilderness in the midst of cultivation.

There were not wanted figures to brighten the landscape. A woman dressed in white sat under one

of the hawthorns, with a baby on her lap; and a nursemaid, in gayer raiment, stood by, looking down at the child.

How well George Fairfax remembered the slight girlish figure, and the day when he had come upon it unawares in Marley-wood! He stood a few paces off, and listened to the soft sweet voice.

Clarissa was talking to her baby in the unintelligible mother-language inspired by the occasion. A baby just able to smile at her, and coo and crow and chuckle in that peculiarly unctuous manner common to babies of amiable character; a fair blue-eyed baby, big and bonny, with soft rings of flaxen hair upon his pink young head, and tender little arms that seemed meant for nothing so much as to be kissed.

After a good deal of that sweet baby-talk, there was a little discussion between the mistress and maid; and then the child was wrapped up as carefully as if destruction were in the breath of the softest June zephyr. Mr. Fairfax was afraid the mother was going away with the child, and that his chance would be lost; but it was not so. The maid tripped off with the infant, after it had been brought back two or three times to be half smothered with kisses—kisses which it seemed to relish in its own peculiar way,

opening its mouth to receive them, as if they had been something edible. The baby was carried away at last, and Clarissa took up a book and began to read.

George Fairfax waited till the maid had been gone about ten minutes, and then came slowly down the hollow to the spot where Clarissa was seated. The rustle of the fern startled her; she looked up, and saw him standing by her side. It was just a year since he had surprised her in Mr. Wooster's garden at Henley. She had thought of him very much in that time, but less since the birth of her boy. She turned very pale at sight of him; and when she tried to speak, the words would not come: her lips only moved tremulously.

'I hope I did not alarm you very much,' he said, 'by the suddenness of my appearance. I thought I heard your voice just now speaking to some one'—he had not the heart to mention her baby—'and came down here to look for you. What a charming spot it is!'

She had recovered her self-possession by this time, and was able to answer him quite calmly. 'Yes, it is very pretty. It was a favourite spot of Austin's. I have at least a dozen sketches of it done by him. But I did not know you were in Yorkshire, Mr. Fairfax.'

She wondered whether he was staying at Hale; and then it flashed upon her that there had been a reconciliation between him and Lady Geraldine.

'I have not been long in Yorkshire. I am merely here *en passant*, in short. My only excuse for approaching you lies in the fact that I have come to talk to you about your brother.'

'About Austin!' exclaimed Clarissa, with a look of alarm. 'There is nothing wrong—he is well, I hope?'

'Pray don't alarm yourself. Yes, he is tolerably well, I believe; and there is nothing wrong—nothing that need cause you any immediate concern, at least. I am going to Paris, and I thought you might be glad to send some message.'

'You are very kind to think of that; yes, I shall be glad to send to him. He is not a good correspondent, and I get very anxious about him sometimes. What you said just now seemed to imply that there *was* something wrong. Pray be candid with me, Mr. Fairfax.'

He did not answer her immediately; in fact, for the moment he scarcely was conscious of her words. He was looking at the beautiful face—looking at it with a repressed passion that was deeper and more

real than any he had ever felt in his life. His thoughts wandered away from Austin Lovel. He was thinking what he would have given, what peril he would have dared, to call this woman his own. All this lower world seemed nothing to him when weighed against her; and in such a moment a man of his stamp rarely remembers any other world.

'There is something wrong,' repeated Clarissa with increasing anxiety. 'I entreat you to tell me the truth!'

'Yes, there is something wrong,' he answered vaguely; and then, wrenching his mind away from those wild speculations as to what he would or would not do to win Daniel Granger's wife, he went on in another tone: 'The truth is, my dear Mrs. Granger, I was in Paris last winter, and saw something of your brother's mode of life; and I cannot say that I consider it a satisfactory one. You have sent him a good deal of money since I saw you last, I daresay? Pray understand that there is nothing intrusive or impertinent in my question. I only wish to be some use to you, if I can.'

'I am sure of that. Yes; I have sent him what I could—about four hundred pounds—since last June; and he has been very grateful, poor fellow!

He ought to know that he is welcome to every shilling I have. I could send him much more, of course, if I cared to ask my husband for money.'

'It is wiser to trust to your own resources. And I doubt if the command of much money would be a positive benefit to your brother. You have asked me to be candid; and I shall obey you, even at the hazard of giving you pain. There is a kind of constitutional weakness in your brother's nature. He is a man open to every influence, and not always governed by the best influences. I saw a good deal of him when I was last in Paris, and I saw him most in the fastest society, amongst people who petted him for the sake of his genius and vivacity, but who would turn their backs upon him to-morrow if he were no longer able to amuse them; the set into which an artist is so apt to fall when his home influences are not strong enough to keep him steady, and when he has that lurking disposition to Bohemianism which has been the bane of your brother's life. I speak entirely without reserve, you see.'

'I am grateful to you for doing so. Poor Austin! if he had only chosen more wisely! But his wife is fond of him, you say?'

'Too fond of him, perhaps; for she is very much

given to torment him with jealous outbreaks; and he is not a man to take that sort of thing pleasantly. She does not go into society with him; indeed, I doubt if half-a-dozen out of the people whom he lives amongst know that he has a wife. I found his social position considerably improved; thanks to your remittances, no doubt. He was still in the Rue du Chevalier Bayard—as, of course, you know—but had moved a stage lower down, and had furnished a painting-room in the stereotyped style—Flemish carved buffets, dingy tapestry from a passage behind the Rue Richelieu, and a sprinkling of bric-à-brac from the Quai Voltaire. The poor little woman and her children were banished; and he had a room full of visitors chattering round him while he painted. You know his wonderful facility. The atmosphere was cloudy with tobacco-smoke; and the men were drinking that abominable concoction of wormwood with which young France cultivates madness and early doom.'

'It is not a pleasant picture,' said Clarissa with a profound sigh.

'No, my dear Mrs. Granger; but it is a faithful one. Mr. Lovel had won a certain reputation for his airy style of art, and was beginning to get better

prices for his pictures; but I fancy he has a capacity for spending money, and an inability to save it, which would bring him always to the same level of comparative insolvency. I have known so many men like that; and a man who begins in that way so rarely ends in any other way.'

'What am I to do!' exclaimed Clarissa piteously; 'what can I do to help him?'

'I am almost at a loss to suggest anything. Perhaps if you were on the spot, your influence might do something. I know he loves you, and is more moved by the mention of your name than by any sermon one could preach to him. But I suppose there is no chance of your being in Paris.'

'I don't know. Mr. Granger talked some time ago of spending the autumn abroad, and asked me if I should like to see a New-Year's day in Paris. I think, if I were to express a wish about it, he would take me there; and it would be such happiness to me to see Austin!' And then Mrs. Granger thought of her baby, and wondered whether the atmosphere of Paris would be favourable to that rare and beauteous blossom; whether the tops-and-bottoms of the French capital would agree with his tender digestive machinery, and if the cowkeepers of the Faubourg St.

Honoré were an honest and unadulterating race. The very notion of taking the treasure away from his own nurseries, his own cow, his own goat-chaise, was enough to make her shudder.

'It would be the best chance for his redemption. A little womanly kindness and counsel from you to the wife might bring about a happier state of things in his home; and a man who can be happy at home is in a measure saved. It is hardly possible for your brother to mix much with the people amongst whom I saw him without injury to himself. They are people to whom dissipation is the very salt of life; people who breakfast at the Moulin Rouge at three o'clock in the afternoon, and eat ices at midnight to the music of the cascade in the Bois; people to be seen at every race-meeting; men who borrow money at seventy-five per cent to pay for opera-boxes and dinners at the Café Riche, and who manage the rest of their existence on credit.'

'But what could my influence do against such friends as these?' asked Clarissa in a hopeless tone.

'Who can say? It might do wonders. I know your brother has a heart, and that you have power to touch it. Take my advice, Mrs. Granger, and try to be in Paris as soon as you can.'

'I will,' she answered fervently. 'I would do anything to save him.' She looked at her watch, and rose from the seat under the hawthorn. 'It is nearly two o'clock,' she said, 'and I must go back to the house. You will come to luncheon, of course?'

'Thanks—no. I have an engagement that will take me back to the town immediately.'

'But Mr. Granger will be surprised to hear that you have been here without calling upon him.'

'Need Mr. Granger hear of my coming?' George Fairfax asked in a low tone.

Clarissa flushed scarlet.

'I have no secrets from my husband, Mr. Fairfax,' she said, 'even about trifles.'

'Ten thousand pardons! I scarcely want to make my presence here a secret; but, in short, I came solely to speak to you about a subject in which I knew you were deeply interested, and I had not contemplated calling upon Mr. Granger.'

They were walking slowly up the grassy slope as they talked; and after this there came a silence, during which Clarissa quickened her pace a little, George Fairfax keeping still by her side. Her heart beat faster than its wont; and she had a vague sense of danger in this man's presence—a sense of a net

being woven round her, a lurking suspicion that this apparent interest in her brother veiled some deeper feeling.

They came out of the hollow, side by side, into a short arcade of flowering limes; at the end of which there was a broad sweep of open grass. A man on a deep-chested strong-limbed gray horse was riding slowly towards them across the grass — Daniel Granger.

That picture of his wife walking in the little avenue of limes, with George Fairfax by her side, haunted Mr. Granger with a strange distinctness in days to come,—the slight white-robed figure against the background of sunlit greenery; the young man's handsome head, uncovered, and stooping a little as he spoke to his companion.

The master of Arden Court dismounted, and led his horse by the bridle as he came forward to meet Mr. Fairfax. The two men shook hands; but not very warmly. The encounter mystified Daniel Granger a little. It was strange to find a man he had supposed to be at the other end of England strolling in the park with his wife, and that man the one about whom he had had many a dreary half-hour of brooding. He waited for an explanation, however,

without any outward show of surprise. The business was simple and natural enough, no doubt, he told himself.

'Have you been to the house?' he asked; 'I have been out all the morning.'

'No; I was on my way there, when I came upon Mrs. Granger in the most romantic spot yonder. I felt that I was rather early for a morning-call even in the depths of the country, and had strolled out of the beaten path to get rid of an hour or so.'

'I did not know you were in Yorkshire,' said Mr. Granger, not in the most cordial tone. 'You are staying at Hale, I suppose?'

'No; Lady Laura is away, you know.'

'Ah—to be sure; I had forgotten:'

'I am spending a few days with a bachelor friend in Holborough. I am off to Germany before the week is out.'

Mr. Granger was not sorry to hear this. He was not jealous of George Fairfax. If anybody had suggested the possibility of his entertaining such a sentiment, that person would have experienced the full force of Daniel Granger's resentment; but this was just the one man whom he fancied his wife might have cared for a little before her marriage. He was

not a man given to petty jealousies; and of late, since the birth of his son, there had been growing up in his mind a sense of security in his wife's fidelity —her affection even. The union between them had seemed very perfect after the advent of the child; and the master of Arden Court felt almost as if there were nothing upon this earth left for him to desire. But he was a little puzzled by the presence of George Fairfax, nevertheless.

Holborough was a small place; and he began to speculate immediately upon the identity of this bachelor friend of Mr. Fairfax's. It was not a garrison town. The young men of the place were for the most part small professional men—half-a-dozen lawyers and doctors, two or three curates, a couple of bankers' sons, an auctioneer or two, ranking vaguely between the trading and professional classes, and the sons of tradesmen. Among them all Mr. Granger could remember no one likely to be a friend of George Fairfax. It might possibly be one of the curates; but it seemed scarcely probable that Mr. Fairfax would come two hundred and fifty miles to abide three days with a curate. Nor was it the season of partridges. There was no shooting to attract Mr. Fairfax to the neighbourhood of Holborough. There was trout,

certainly, to be found in abundance in brooks, and a river within a walk of the town; and Mr. Fairfax might be passionately fond of fly-fishing.

'You will come in and have some luncheon, of course,' Mr. Granger said, when they came to the gateway, where George Fairfax pulled up, and began to wish them good-bye. Not to ask the man to eat and drink would have seemed to him the most unnatural thing in the world.

'Thanks. I think I had better deny myself that pleasure,' Mr. Fairfax said doubtfully. 'The day is getting on, and—and I have an engagement for the afternoon.' ('Trout, no doubt,' thought Mr. Granger.) 'I have seen you, that is the grand point. I could not leave Yorkshire without paying my respects to you and Mrs. Granger.'

'Do you leave so soon?'

'To-morrow, I think.'

'A hurried journey for trout,' thought Mr. Granger.

He insisted upon the visitor coming in to luncheon. George Fairfax was not very obdurate. It was so sweet to be near the woman he loved, and he had not the habit of refusing himself the things that were sweet to him. They went into the small dining-room.

The luncheon bell had rung a quarter of an hour ago, and Miss Granger was waiting for her parents, with an air of placid self abnegation, by an open window.

There was a good deal of talk during luncheon, but the chief talker was George Fairfax. Clarissa was grave and somewhat absent. She was thinking of her brother Austin, and the gloomy account of him which she had just heard. It was hardly a surprise to her. His letters had been few and far between, and they had not been hopeful, or, at the best, brightened by only a flash of hopefulness, which was more like bravado, now and then. His necessity for money, too, had seemed without limit. She was planning her campaign. Come what might, she must contrive some means of being in Paris before long. Mr. Fairfax was going on to Carlsruhe, that was an advantage; for something in his manner to-day had told her that he must always be more or less than her friend. She had a vague sense that his eagerness to establish a confidence between her and himself was a menace of danger to her.

'If I can only go to Austin myself,' she thought, 'there need be no intermediary.'

Luncheon was over, and still Mr. Fairfax lingered

—strangely indifferent to the waning of an afternoon which seemed peculiarly advantageous for fly-fishing, Mr. Granger thought. They went into the drawing-room, and Mr. Fairfax dawdled an hour away talking of Lyvedon, and giving a serio-comic description of himself in the novel character of a country gentleman. It was not till Mr. Granger had looked at his watch once or twice in a surreptitious manner, thinking of an engagement to meet his architect for the inspection of some dilapidated cottages on the newest part of his estate, that the visitor rose to depart. Daniel Granger had quite warmed to him by this time. His manner was so natural in its pleasant airiness: it was not easy to think there could be any lurking evil beneath such a show of candour.

'Can't you stay and dine with us?' asked Mr. Granger; 'or will you go back to Holborough and fetch your friend? We shall be very glad to know him, if we don't know him already.'

If a blush had been possible to George Fairfax, this friendly speech would have raised it; but the capacity had departed from him before he left Eton. He did feel ashamed of himself nevertheless.

'You are more than good,' he said, 'but my friend seldom goes anywhere. Good-bye.'

He made his adieux with an agreeable abruptness, not caring to prolong the dinner question. Such men as he tell lies without stint upon occasion; but the men are few to whom it is actually congenial to lie. He was glad to get away even from the woman he loved, and the sense of shame was strong upon him as he departed.

If his mother, who was anxiously awaiting a letter from Paris or Carlsruhe, could have known of his presence here in this place, to which his father had come years ago to betray her! If she who loved him so fondly, and was so full of prayers and hopes for his future, could have seen him so utterly on the wrong road, what bitter shame and lamenting there would have been in the halls of Lyvedon that day—those deserted halls in which the lady sat alone among the sombre old-world grandeurs of oak and tapestry, and sighed for her absent son!

Instead of going straight back to the Holborough high-road, Mr. Fairfax struck across the woods by that path which led to the mill-stream and the orchard, where he had parted from Clarissa on that cheerless October night nearly three years ago. He knew that Mr. Lovel was away, and the cottage only

tenanted by servants, and he had a fancy for looking at the place where he had been so angry and so miserable—the scene of that one rejection which had stung him to the very quick, the single humiliation of his successful career. It was only the morbid fancy of an idle man, who had an afternoon to dispose of somehow.

Half-way between the Court and the cottage, he heard the jingling of bells, and presently, flashing and gleaming among the trees, he saw a gaily-painted carriage drawn by a pair of goats, with plated harness that shone in the sun. Mixed with the joyous jingle of the bells, there came the sound of an infant's laughter. It was the baby taking his after-dinner airing, attended by a couple of nurses. A turn in the path brought George Fairfax and the heir of Arden face to face.

A sudden impulse seized him—a sudden impulse of tenderness for *her* child. He took the little bundle of rosy babyhood and lace and muslin in his arms, and kissed the soft little face as gently as a woman, and looked into the innocent blue eyes, dilated to an almost impossible extent in a wondering stare, with unspeakable love and melancholy in his own. Great heaven! if Clarissa had been his wife, this child his

son, what a happy man he might have been, what a new charm there would have been in the possession of a fine estate, what a new zest in life, the savour of which seemed to have departed altogether of late!

He put the little one back into his cushioned seat in the goat-chaise with supreme care and gentleness, not ruffling so much as a plume in his dainty white satin hat.

'A fine boy, Mrs. Nurse,' he said, feeling in his waistcoat-pocket for bacsheesh; to which proposition the portly head-nurse, who had stared at him, aghast with horror, while he handled the infant, assented with enthusiasm.

'I never nursed a finer, sir; and I was head-nurse to Lady Fitz-Lubin, which my lady had five boys, and not a girl between them; and Mrs. Granger does doat on him so. I never see a ma that rapt up in her child.'

Mr. Fairfax gave her half a sovereign, stooped down to kiss the baby again—it is doubtful if he had ever kissed a baby before—and then walked on, wondering at the new sensation. Such a little soft thing, that opened its mouth to be kissed, like a petted bird! And yet he could contemplate a future in which he should come between Clarissa and this

child; he could dream of a possibility which should make its mother's name a shame to this little one.

Mr. Granger kept his appointment with the architect, and came to the natural conclusion of a rich man upon the subject of dilapidated buildings. After inspecting the lopsided old cottages, with their deep roomy chimneys, in which the farm-labourer loved to sit of a night, roasting his ponderous boots, and smoking the pipe of meditation, and their impossible staircases, which seemed to have been designed with a deliberate view to the breaking of legs and endangerment of spines, Mr. Granger made a wry face, and ordered that rubbish to be swept away.

'You can build me half a dozen upon the New Arden design,' he said; 'red brick, with stone dressings; and be sure you put a tablet with the date in front of each.'

He was thinking of his son, anxious that there should be some notable improvement, some new building every year, to mark the progress of his boy's existence.

The farm-labourers and their wives did not look so delighted as they might have been by this edict. These benighted souls liked the old cottages, lop-

sided as they were — liked the crooked staircase squeezed into a corner of the living room below, the stuffy little dens above, with casement windows which only opened on one side, letting in the smallest modicum of air, and were not often opened at all. Cottages on the New Arden model meant stone floors below and open rafters above, thorough draughts everywhere, and, worst of all, they meant weekly inspection by Miss Granger. The free sons and daughters of Hickly-on-the-Hill — this little cluster of houses which formed a part of Mr. Granger's new estate—had rejoiced that they were not as the Ardenites; that they could revel in warmth and dirt, and eat liver-and-bacon for supper on a Saturday night, without any fear of being lectured for their extravagance by the omniscient Sophia on the following Monday, convicted of their guilt by the evidence of the grease in an unwashed frying-pan; that their children could sport on the hillside in garments that were guiltless of strings; that, in short, they were outside the circle of Miss Granger's sympathies, and could live their own lives. But that sweet liberty was all over now; with the red brick and stone dressings would come the Draconian laws of New Arden; no more corners for the comfortable

accumulation of dirt, no more delicious little cupboards for the stowing away of rubbish. Everything was to be square and solid and stony. They heard Mr. Granger giving orders that the chimney was to be flush with the wall, and so on; the stove, an 'Oxford front,' warranted to hold not more than a pound and a half of coal; no recesses in which old age could sit and croon, no cosy nook for the cradle of infancy.

After this interview with the architect, Mr. Granger rode home through Holborough. His way took him past that very hotel where George Fairfax was staying—the chief inn of the town, a fine old red-brick building that filled nearly one side of the market-place.

It happened that just as Mr. Granger rode along the High-street, where there were some half a dozen stragglers visible upon a wide expanse of pavement, and one carriage waiting at the draper's, Mr. Fairfax walked up the broad steps of the hotel and entered—entered with the air of a man who lived there, Daniel Granger thought. And he had said that he was staying with a bachelor friend. Mr. Granger rode slowly past the principal part of the hotel to an archway at the end—an archway leading to livery stables, where

the ostler was lounging. He stopped opposite this archway, and beckoned the man over to him.

'There was a gentleman went into the hotel just now,' he said; 'did you see him?'

'Yes, sir, I seed him. Mr. Fairfax; him as was to have married Lady Laura Armstrong's sister.'

'Is he staying in the house, do you know?'

'Yes, sir; came last night, down from London. Shall I take him your card, sir?'

'No, thank you, Giles; I won't call upon him this afternoon. I only wanted to be sure. Good-day.'

He rode on. What was the meaning of this lie which George Fairfax had told him? Had it any meaning which it behoved him to fathom? It was strange, at the least—strange enough to make Mr. Granger very uncomfortable as he rode slowly back to the Court.

CHAPTER XV.

AUSTIN.

LATE in the autumn of that year, Mr. Granger and his household took up their abode in Paris. Clarissa had expressed a wish to winter in that brilliant city, and Daniel Granger had no greater desire than to please her. But, in making any concession of this kind, he did it in such a quiet unobtrusive way, that his wife was scarcely aware how entirely her wishes had been studied. He was too proud a man to parade his affection for her; he kept a check upon himself rather, and in a manner regulated his own conduct by the standard of hers. There was never any show of devotion on his part. The world might have taken them for a couple brought together by convenience, and making the best of their loveless union.

So, with regard to the gratification of her wishes, it seemed always that the thing which Clarissa de-

sired, happened to suit his own humour, rather than that he sacrificed all personal feeling for her pleasure. In this Parisian arrangement it had been so, and his wife had no idea that it was entirely on her account that Daniel Granger set up his tent in the Faubourg St. Honoré.

The fair Sophia had, however, a very shrewd suspicion of the fact, and, for some weeks prior to the departure from Arden, existed in a state of suppressed indignation, which was not good for the model villagers; her powers of observation were, if possible, sharpened in the matter of cobwebs; her sense of smell intensified in relation to cabbage-water. Nor did she refrain from making herself eminently disagreeable to her stepmother.

'I should not have supposed you would so soon be tired of Arden Court,' she remarked pleasantly, during that dreary quarter of an hour after dinner which Mr. Granger and his wife and daughter were wont to pass in the contemplation of crystallised apricots and hothouse grapes, and the exchange of the baldest commonplaces in the way of conversation. Perhaps if Clarissa and her husband had been alone on such occasions, that air of ceremony might have vanished. The young wife might have drawn her

chair a little nearer her husband's, and there might have been some pleasant talk about that inexhaustible source of wonder and delight, the baby. But with Miss Granger always at hand, the dessert was as ceremonious as if there had been a party of eighteen, and infinitely more dreary, lacking the cheery clatter and buzz of company. She ate five hothouse grapes, and sipped half a glass of claret, with as solemn an air as if she had been making a libation to the gods.

Mr. Granger looked up from his plate when his daughter made this remark about Arden, and glanced inquiringly at his wife, with a shadow of displeasure in his face. Yielding and indulgent as he had been to her, there was in his composition something of the stuff that makes a tyrant. His wife must love the things that he loved. It would have been intolerable to him to suppose that Mrs. Granger could grow weary of the house that he had beautified.

'I am not tired of the Court,' Clarissa answered with a sad smile. 'There are too many recollections to make it dear to me.'

Daniel Granger's face flushed ever so slightly at this speech. It was the past, then, and not the present, that rendered the place dear to her.

'I could never grow tired of Arden,' she went on; 'but I think it will be very nice to spend a winter in Paris.'

'Lady Laura Armstrong has put that notion into your head, no doubt,' said Miss Granger, with the faintest suspicion of a sneer. She was not very warmly attached to the lady of Hale Castle nowadays, regarding her as the chief promoter of Mr. Granger's marriage.

'Lady Laura has said that they enjoyed themselves very much in Paris the winter before last,' Clarissa answered frankly; 'and has promised me plenty of introductions. She even promises that she and Mr. Armstrong will come over for a week or two, while we are there.'

'And poor Lady Geraldine Challoner?'

Miss Granger always exhibited a profound pity for Lady Geraldine, and never lost any opportunity of dwelling upon Mr. Fairfax's bad conduct.

'No; I don't suppose Lady Geraldine would go with them,' Clarissa answered, colouring a little. The name of Geraldine Challoner was always painful to her. 'She doesn't care about going anywhere.'

'Perhaps she would not care to run the risk of meeting Mr. Fairfax,' suggested Sophia.

Mr. Granger looked up again, with that shadow of displeasure upon his countenance.

'She would not be more likely to meet him in Paris than at Hale,' replied Clarissa. 'He has gone to Germany.'

'Yes, for the autumn, he said. Depend upon it, he will spend the winter in Paris. I have always observed that those dissipated kind of men prefer Paris to London.'

'I don't think you have any right to call Mr. Fairfax dissipated, Sophia,' said her father, with an offended air; 'and I don't think that his movements can be of the smallest consequence to you, nor those of the Hale Castle people either. Clarissa and I have determined to spend two or three months in Paris, and we are not in the slightest degree dependent upon our English friends for our enjoyment there. If you are disinclined to accompany us, and would rather remain at Arden—'

'O, papa, papa!' cried Sophia, with an injured look, 'don't say that; don't allow me to think I have grown quite indifferent to you.'

'You have not grown indifferent to me; but I don't want to take you away from home against your wish.'

'My wish is to be anywhere with you, papa; *anywhere*—even though you may feel me an incumbrance. I could endure the humiliation of feeling that, so long as I was allowed to remain with you.'

Mr. Granger gave a sigh that was almost a groan, and, for perhaps the first time in his life, it occurred to him that it would be a pleasant thing if his only daughter were to fall in love with some fortunate youth, and desire to marry him. A curate even. There was Tillott. Why shouldn't she marry Tillott? He, Daniel Granger, would give his child a handsome portion, and they could go through life inspecting model cottages, and teaching village children the works and ways of all those wicked kings of Israel, who made groves and set up the idols of their heathen neighbours; a pure and virtuous and useful life, without question, if tempered with some consideration for the feelings of the model cottagers, and some mercy for the brains of the humble scholars.

In the interval between this little after-dinner scene and the departure from Arden, Mr. Granger invited Mr. Tillott to dinner two or three times, and watched him with the eyes of anxiety as he

conversed with Sophia. But although the curate was evidently eager to find favour in the sight of the damsel, the damsel herself showed no sign of weakness. Mr. Granger sighed, and told himself that the lamp of hope burned dimly in this quarter.

'She really ought to marry,' he said to himself. 'A girl of her energetic indefatigable nature would be a treasure to some man, and she is only wasting herself here. Perhaps in Paris we shall meet some one;' and then there arose before Mr. Granger the vision of some foreign adventurer, seeking to entangle the wealthy English 'meess' in his meshes. Paris might be a dangerous place; but with such a girl as Sophia, there could be no fear; she was a young woman who might be trusted to walk with unfaltering steps through the most tortuous pathways of this life, always directing herself aright, and coming in at the finish just at that very point at which a well-brought-up young person should arrive.

Mr. Granger made his Parisian arrangements on the large scale which became him as a landed gentleman of unlimited wealth. A first floor of some ten spacious rooms was selected in one of the bran-new stone mansions in a bran-new street in the fashion-

able Faubourg; a house that seemed to have been built for the habitation of giants; a house made splendid by external decoration in carved stonework, garlands of stone-fruit and flowers, projecting lion-heads, caryatides, and so on; no gloomy *porte-cochère*, but a street-door, through which a loaded drag might have been driven without damage to the hats of the outside passengers. A house glorified within by egg-and-dart mouldings, white enamelled woodwork and much gilding; but a house in which the winter wind howled as in a primeval forest, and which required to be supplied with supplementary padded crimson-velvet doors before the spacious chambers could be made comfortable. Here Mr. Granger took up his abode, with ten of his Arden Court servants quartered on a floor above. The baby had a nursery looking into the broad bare street, where some newly-planted sticks of the sycamore species shivered in the north-east wind; and the baby took his matutinal airings in the Tuileries Gardens, and his afternoon drives in the Bois, while every movement of his infant existence was watched or directed by the tenderest of mothers. The chief nurse, who had lived with more fashionable mistresses, for whom the duties of the nursery were

subordinate to the business of society, pronounced Mrs. Granger 'fidgety;' a very sweet lady, but too fond of interfering about trifles, and not reposing boundless confidence in the experience of her nurse.

There were a good many English people in Paris this year whom the Grangers knew, and Lady Laura had insisted upon giving Clarissa introductions to some of her dearest friends among the old French nobility—people who had known Lord Calderwood in their days of exile—and more than one dearest friend among the newer lights of the Napoleonic firmament. Then there were a Russian princess and a Polish countess or so, whom Lady Laura had brought to Mrs. Granger's receptions in Clarges-street: so that Clarissa and her husband found themselves at once in the centre of a circle, from the elegant dissipations whereof there was no escape. The pretty Mrs. Granger and the rich Mr. Granger were in request everywhere; nor was the stately Sophia neglected, although she took her share in all festivities with the familiar sunday-school primness, and seemed to vivacious Gaul the very archetype of that representative young English lady who is always exclaiming 'Shocking!' Even after her

arrival in Paris, when she felt herself so very near him, after so many years of severance, Clarissa did not find it the easiest thing in the world to see her brother. Mr. and Mrs. Granger had only spent a couple of days in Paris during their honeymoon, and Daniel Granger planned a round of sight-seeing, in the way of churches, picture-galleries, and cemeteries, which fully occupied the first four or five days after their arrival. Clarissa was obliged to be deeply interested in all the details of gothic architecture—to appreciate Ingres, to give her mind to Gerome—when her heart was yearning for that meeting which she had waited so long to compass. Mr. Granger, as an idle man, with no estate to manage—no new barns being built within his morning's ride—no dilapidated cottages to be swept away—was not easily to be got rid of. He devoted his days to showing his wife the glories of the splendid city, which he knew by heart himself, and admired sufficiently in a sober business-like way. The evenings were mortgaged to society. Clarissa had been more than a week in Paris before she had a morning to herself; and even then there was Miss Granger to be disposed of, and Miss Granger's curiosity to be satisfied.

Mr. Granger had gone to breakfast at the Maison Dorée with a mercantile magnate from his own country—a solemn commercial breakfast, whereat all the airy trifles and dainty compositions of fish, flesh, and fowl with which the butterfly youth of France are nourished, were to be set before unappreciative Britons. At ten o'clock Clarissa ordered her carriage. It was best to go in her own carriage, she thought, even at the risk of exciting the curiosity of servants. To send for a hired vehicle would have caused greater wonder; to walk alone was impossible; to walk with her nurse and child might have been considered eccentric.

She could not even take an airing, however, without some discussion with Miss Granger. That young lady was established in the drawing-room—the vast foreign chamber, which never looked like a home—illuminating a new set of gothic texts for the adornment of her school. She sorely missed the occupation and importance afforded her by the model village. In Paris there was no one afraid of her; no humble matrons to quail as her severe eyes surveyed wall and ceiling, floor and surbase. And being of a temperament which required perpetual employment, she was fain to fall back upon illumination, Berlin-wool

work, and early morning practice of pianoforte music of the most strictly mathematical character. It was her boast that she had been thoroughly 'grounded' in the science of harmony; but although she could have given a reason for every interval in a sonata, her playing never sparkled into brilliancy or melted into tenderness, and never had her prim cold fingers found their way to a human soul.

'Are you going out so early?' this wise damsel asked wonderingly, as Clarissa came into the drawing-room in her bonnet and shawl.

'Yes, it is such a fine morning, and I think baby will enjoy it. I have not had a drive with him since we have been here.'

'No,' replied Sophia, 'you have only had papa. I shouldn't think he would be very much flattered if he heard you preferred baby.'

'I did not say that I preferred baby, Sophia. What a habit you have of misrepresenting me!'

The nurse appeared at this moment, carrying the heir of the Grangers, gloriously arrayed in blue velvet, and looking fully conscious of his magnificence.

'But I do like to have a drive with my pet-lamb, don't I, darling?' said the mother, stooping to kiss

the plump rosy cheek. And then there followed some low confidential talk, in the fond baby language peculiar to young mothers.

'I should have thought you would have been glad to get a morning alone, for once in a way,' remarked Sophia, coming over to the baby, and giving him a stately kiss. She liked him tolerably well in her own way, and was not angry with him for having come into the world to oust her from her proud position as sole heiress to her father's wealth. The position had been very pleasant to her, and she had not seen it slip away from her without many a pang; but, however she might dislike Clarissa, she was not base enough to hate her father's child. If she could have had the sole care and management of him, physicked and dieted him after her own method, and developed the budding powers of his infant mind by her favourite forcing system—made a model villager of him, in short—she might have grown even to love him. But these privileges being forbidden to her—her wisdom being set at naught, and her counsel rejected—she could not help regarding Lovel Granger as more or less an injury.

'I should have thought you would have been glad of a morning at home, Clarissa,' she repeated.

'Not such a fine morning as this, Sophy. It would be such a pity for baby to lose the sunshine; and I have really nothing to do.'

'If I had known a little sooner that you were going, I would have gone with you,' said Miss Granger.

Clarissa's countenance fell. She could not help that little troubled look, which told Miss Granger that her society would not have been welcome.

'You would have had no objection to my coming with you, I suppose?' the fair Sophia said sharply. 'Baby is not quite a monopoly.'

'Of course not. If you'll put on your things now, Sophia, I'll wait for you.'

It was a hard thing for Clarissa to make the offer, when she had been waiting so anxiously for this opportunity of seeing her brother. To be in the same city with him, and not see him, was more painful than to be divided from him by half the earth, as she had been. It was harder still to have to plot and plan and stoop to falsehood in order to compass a meeting. But she remembered the stern cold look in her husband's face when she had spoken of Austin, and she could not bring herself to degrade her brother by entreating Daniel Granger's indulgence for his

past misdeeds, or Daniel Granger's interest in his future fortunes.

Happily Sophia had made elaborate preparations for the gothic texts, and was not inclined to waste so much trouble.

'I have got my colours all ready,' she said, 'and have put everything out, you see. No, I don't think I'll go to-day. But another time, if you'll be so kind as to let me know *beforehand*, I shall be pleased to go with my brother. I suppose you know there's an east wind to-day, by the bye.'

The quarter whence the wind came, was a subject about which Clarissa had never concerned herself. The sun was shining, and the sky was blue.

'We have plenty of wraps,' she said; 'and we can have the carriage closed if we are cold.'

'It is not a day upon which *I* should take an infant out,' Miss Granger murmured, dipping her brush in some Prussian-blue; 'but of course you know best.'

'O, we shall take care of baby, depend upon it. Good-bye, Sophy.'

And Clarissa departed, anxious to avoid farther remonstrance on the part of her step-daughter. She told the coachman to drive to the Luxembourg-gar-

dens, intending to leave the nurse and baby to promenade that favourite resort, while she made her way on foot to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard. She remembered that George Fairfax had described her brother's lodging as near the Luxembourg.

They drove through the gay Parisian streets, past the pillar in the Place Vendôme, and along the Rue de la Paix, all shining with jewellers' ware, and the Rue de Rivoli, where the chestnut-trees in the gardens of the Tuileries were shedding their last leaves upon the pavement, past the airy tower of St. Jacques, and across the bridge into that unknown world on the other side of the Seine. The nurse, who had seen very little of that quarter of the town, wondered what obscure region she was traversing, and wondered still more when they alighted at the somewhat shabby-looking gardens.

'These are the Luxembourg-gardens,' said Clarissa. 'As you have been to the Tuileries every day, I thought it would be a change for you to come here.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Brobson, the chief nurse; 'but I don't think as these gardings is anyways equal to the Tooleries—nor to Regent's-park even. When I were in Paris with Lady Fitz-

Lubin we took the children to the Tooleries or the Bore de Boulong every day—but, law me, the Bore de Boulong were a poor place in those days to what it is now.'

Clarissa took a couple of turns along one of the walks with Mrs. Brobson, and then, as they were going back towards the gate, she said, as carelessly as she could manage to say:

'There is a person living somewhere near here whom I want to see, Mrs. Brobson. I'll leave you and baby in the gardens for half an hour or so, while I go and pay my visit.'

Mrs. Brobson stared. It was not an hour in the day when any lady she had ever served was wont to pay visits; and that Mrs. Granger of Arden Court should traverse a neighbourhood of narrow streets and tall houses, on foot and alone, to call upon her acquaintance at eleven o'clock in the morning, seemed to her altogether inexplicable.

'You'll take the carriage, won't you, ma'am?' she said, with undisguised astonishment.

'No, I shall not want the carriage; it's very near. Be sure you keep baby warm, Mrs. Brobson.'

Clarissa hurried out into the street. The landau,

with its pair of Yorkshire-bred horses, was moving slowly up and down, to the admiration of juvenile Paris, which looked upon Mr. Granger's deep-chested, strong-limbed bays almost as a new order in the animal creation. Mrs. Granger felt that the eyes of coachman and footman were upon her as she turned the first corner, thinking of nothing for the moment, but how to escape the watchfulness of her own servants. She walked a little way down the street, and then asked a sleepy-looking waiter, who was sweeping the threshold of a very dingy restaurant, to direct her to the Rue du Chevalier Bayard. It was *tous près*, the man said; only a turn to the right, at that corner yonder, and the next turning was the street she wanted. She thanked him, and hurried on, with her heart beating faster at every step. Austin might be out, she thought, and her trouble wasted; and there was no knowing when she might have another opportunity. Even if he were at home, their interview must needs be brief: there was the nurse waiting and wondering; the baby exposed to possible peril from east winds.

The Rue du Chevalier Bayard was a street of tall gaunt houses that had seen better days—houses with *porte-cochères*, exaggerated iron knockers, and queer

old lamps; dreary balconies on the first-floor, with here and there a plaster vase containing some withered member of the palm tribe, or a faded orange-tree; everywhere and in everything an air of dilapidation and decay; faded curtains, that had once been fine, flapping in the open windows; Venetian shutters going to ruin; and the only glimpse of brightness or domestic comfort confined to the humble parlour of the portress, who kept watch and ward over one of the dismal mansions, and who had a birdcage hanging in her window, an Angora cat sunning itself on the stone sill, and a row of scarlet geraniums in the little iron balcony.

But this model portress did not preside over the house inhabited by Austin Lovel. There Clarissa found only a little deaf old man, who grinned and shook his head helplessly when she questioned him, and shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the staircase—a cavernous stone staircase, with an odour as of newly-opened graves. She went up to the first-floor, past the *entresol*, where the earthy odour was subjugated by a powerful smell of cooking, in which garlic was the prevailing feature. One tall door on the first-floor was painted a pale pink, and had still some dingy indications of former gilding upon its

mouldings. On this pink door was inscribed the name of Mr. Austin, Painter.

Clarissa rang a bell, and a tawdry-looking French servant, with big earrings and a dirty muslin cap, came to answer her summons. Mr. Austin was at home; would madame please to enter. Madame, having replied in the affirmative, was shown into a small sitting-room, furnished with a heterogeneous collection of cabinets, tables, and sofas, every one of which bore the stamp of the broker's shop—things which had been graceful and pretty in their day, but from which the ormolu-moulding had been knocked off here, and the inlaid-wood chipped away there, and the tortoiseshell cracked in another place, until they seemed the very emblems of decay. It was as if they had been set up as perpetual monitors—monuments of man's fragility. 'This is what life comes to,' they said in their silent fashion. This faded rubbish in buhl and marqueterie was useful enough to Mr. Lovel, however; and on his canvas the faded furniture glowed and sparkled with all its original brightness, fresh as the still-life of Meissonier. There were a child's toys scattered on the floor; and Clarissa heard a woman's voice talking to a child in an adjoining room, on the other side of a pair of tall pink

folding-doors. Then she heard her brother's voice saying something to the servant; and at the sound she felt as if she must have fallen to the ground. Then one of the doors was opened, and a woman came in; a pretty, faded-looking woman, dressed in a light-blue morning wrapper that might very well have been cleaner; a woman with a great deal of dyed hair in an untidy mass at the back of her head; a woman whom Clarissa felt it must be a difficult thing to like.

This was her brother's wife, of course. There was a boy of four or five years old clinging to his mother's gown, and Clarissa's heart yearned to the child. He had Austin's face. It would be easy to love *him*, she thought.

'Mr. Austin is in his paintin'-room, madame,' said the wife, putting on a kind of company manner. 'Did you wish to see him about a picture? Je parle très poo de Français, mais si—'

'I am English,' Clarissa answered, smiling; 'if you will kindly tell Mr. Austin a lady from England wishes to see him. What a dear little boy! May I shake hands with him?'

'Give the lady your hand, Henery,' said the mother. 'Not that one,' as the boy, after the invari-

able custom of childhood, offered his left—'the right hand.'

Clarissa took the sticky little paw tenderly in her pearl-gray glove. To think that her brother Austin Lovel should have married a woman who could call her son 'Henery,' and who had such an unmistakable air of commonness!

The wife went back to the painting-room; and returned the next minute to beg the visitor to 'step this way, if you please, ma'am.' She opened one of the folding-doors wide as she spoke, and Clarissa went into a large room, at the other end of which there stood a tall slim young man, in a short velvet coat, before a small easel.

It was her brother Austin; pale and a trifle haggard, too old in looks for his years, but very handsome—a masculine edition of Clarissa herself, in fact; the same delicate clearly-cut features, the same dark hazel eyes, shaded by long brown lashes tinged with gold. This was what Mrs. Granger saw in the broad noonday sunshine; while the painter, looking up from his easel, beheld a radiant creature approaching him, a woman in pale-gray silk, that it would have been rapture to paint; a woman with one of the loveliest faces he had ever seen, crowned with a

broad plait of dark-brown hair, and some delicate structure of point-lace and pink roses, called by courtesy a bonnet.

He laid down his mahl-stick, and came to meet her, with a puzzled look in his face. Her beauty seemed familiar to him somehow, and yet he had no recollection of ever having seen her before. He saw the faded counterpart of that bright face every morning in his looking-glass.

She held out both her hands.

'Austin, don't you know me?'

He gave a cry of pleased surprise, and caught her in his arms.

'Clarissa!' he exclaimed; 'why, my darling, how lovely you have grown! My dear little Clary! How well I remember the sweet young face, and the tears, and kisses, and the slender little figure in its childish dress, that day your father carried you off to school! My own little Clary, what a happiness to see you! But you never told me you were coming to Paris.'

'No, dear, I kept that for a surprise. And are you really glad to see me, Austin?'

'Really glad! Is there any one in the world could make me gladder?'

'I am so happy to hear that. I was almost afraid

you had half forgotten me. Your letters were so few, and so short.'

'Letters!' cried Austin Lovel, with a laugh; 'I never was much of a hand at letter-writing; and then I hadn't anything particularly pleasant to write about. You mustn't gauge my affection by the length of my letters, Clary. And then I have to work deucedly hard when I am at home, and have very little time for scribbling.'

Clarissa glanced round the room while he was speaking. Every detail in her brother's surroundings had an interest for her. Here, as in the drawing-room, there was an untidy air about everything—a want of harmony in all the arrangements. There were Flemish carved-oak cabinets, and big Japan vases; a mantelpiece draped with dusty crimson velvet, a broken Venetian glass above it, and a group of rusty-looking arms on each side; long limp amber curtains to the three tall windows, with festooned valances in an advanced stage of disarrangement and dilapidation. There were some logs burning on the hearth, a pot of chocolate simmering among the ashes, and breakfast laid for one person upon a little table by the fire—the remnant of a perigord pie, flanked by a stone bottle of curaçoa.

She looked at her brother with anxious scrutinising eyes. No, George Fairfax had not deceived her. He had the look of a man who was going the wrong way. There were premature lines across the forehead, and about the dark brilliant eyes; a nervous expression in the contracted lips. It was the face of a man who burns the candle of life at both ends. Late hours, anxiety, dissipation of all kinds, had set their fatal seal upon his countenance.

'Dear Austin, you are as handsome as ever; but I don't think you are looking well,' she said tenderly.

'Don't look so alarmed, my dear girl,' he answered lightly; 'I am well enough; that is to say, I am never ill, never knock under, or strike work. There are men who go through life like that—never ill, and never exactly well. I rarely get up in the morning without a headache; but I generally brighten considerably as the sun goes down. We move with a contrary motion, Helos and I.'

'I am afraid you work too hard, and sit up too late.'

'As to working hard, my dear, that is a necessity; and going out every night is another necessity. I get my commissions in society.'

'But you must have a reputation by this time, Austin; and commissions would come to you, I should think, without your courting them.'

'No, child; I have only a reputation *de salon*, I am only known in a certain set. And a man must live, you see. To a man himself that is the primary necessity. Your generosity set me on my legs last year, and tempted me to take this floor, and make a slight advance movement altogether. I thought better rooms would bring me better work—sitters for a new style of cabinet-portraits, and so on. But so far the rooms have been comparatively a useless extravagance. However, I go out a good deal, and meet a great many influential people; so I can scarcely miss a success in the end.'

'But if you sacrifice your health in the mean time, Austin.'

'Sacrifice my health! That's just like a woman. If a man looks a trifle pale, and dark under the eyes, she begins to fancy he's dying. My poor little wife takes just the same notions into her head, and would like me to stop at home every evening to watch her darn the children's stockings.'

'I think your wife is quite right to be anxious, Austin; and it would be much better for you to stay

at home, even to see stockings darned. It must be very dull for her too when you are out, poor soul.'

Mr. Lovel shrugged his shoulders with a deprecating air.

'*C'est son métier*,' he said. 'I suppose she does find it rather dismal at times; but there are the children, you see—it is a woman's duty to find all-sufficient society in her children. And now, Clary, tell me about yourself. You have made a brilliant match, and are mistress of Arden Court. A strange stroke of fortune that. And you are happy, I hope, my dear?'

'I ought to be very happy,' Clarissa answered, with a faint sigh, thinking perhaps that, bright as her life might be, it was not quite the fulfilment of her vague girlish dreams—not quite the life she had fancied lying before her when the future was all unknown; 'I ought to be very happy and very grateful to Providence; and, O Austin, my boy is the sweetest darling in the world!'

Austin Lovel looked doubtful for a moment, half inclined to think 'my boy' might stand for Daniel Granger.

'You must see him, Austin,' continued his sis-

ter; 'he is nearly ten months old now, and such a beauty!'

'O, the baby!' said Austin, rather coolly. 'I daresay he's a nice little chap, and I should like to see him very much, if it were practicable. But how about Granger himself? He is a good sort of fellow, I hope.'

'He is all goodness to me,' Clarissa answered gravely, casting down her eyes as she spoke; and Austin Lovel knew that the marriage which had given his sister Arden Court had been no love-match.

They talked for some time; talked of the old days when they had been together at Arden; but of the years that made the story of his life, Austin Lovel spoke very little.

'I have always been an unlucky beggar,' he said, in his careless way. 'There's very little use in going over old ground. Some men never get fairly on the high-road of life. They spend their existence wading across swamps, and scrambling through bushes, and never reach any particular point at the end. My career has been that sort of thing.'

'But you are so young, Austin,' pleaded Clarissa, 'and may do so much yet.'

He shook his head with an air of hopelessness that was half indifference.

'My dear child, I am neither a Raffaelle nor a Doré,' he said, 'and I need be one or the other to redeem my past. But so long as I can pick up enough to keep the little woman yonder and the bairns, and get a decent cigar and an honest bottle of Bordeaux, I'm content. Ambition departed from me ten years ago.'

'O Austin, I can't bear to hear you say that! With your genius you ought to do so much. I wish you would be friends with my husband, and that he could be of use to you.'

'My dear Clarissa, put that idea out of your mind at once and for ever. There can be no such thing as friendship between Mr. Granger and me. Do you remember what Samuel Johnson said about some one's distaste for clean linen—"And I, sir, have no passion for it!" I confess to having no passion for respectable people. I am very glad to hear Mr. Granger is a good husband; but he's much too respectable a citizen for my acquaintance.'

Clarissa sighed; there was a prejudice here, even if Daniel Granger could have been induced to think kindly of his brother-in-law.

'Depend upon it, the Prodigal Son had a hard time of it after the fatted calf had been eaten, Clary, and wished himself back among the swine. Do you think, however lenient his father might be, that his brother and the friends of the family spared him? His *past* was thrown in his face, you may be sure. I daresay he went back to his evil ways after a year or so. Good people maintain their monopoly of virtue by making the repentant sinner's life a burden to him.'

Clarissa spoke of his wife presently.

'You must introduce me to her, Austin. She took me for a stranger just now, and I did not undeceive her.'

'Yes, I'll introduce you. There's not much in common between you; but she'll be very proud of your acquaintance. She looks upon my relations as an exalted race of beings, and myself as a kind of fallen angel. You mustn't be too hard upon her, Clary, if she seems not quite the sort of woman you would have chosen for your sister-in-law. She has been a good wife to me, and she was a good daughter to her drunken old father—one of the greatest scamps in London, who used to get his bread—or rather his gin—by standing for Count Ugolino and Cardinal

Wolsey, or anything grim and gray and aquiline nosed in the way of patriarchs. The girl Bessie was a model too in her time; and it was in Jack Redgrave's painting-room—the Preraphaelite fellow who paints fearfully-and-wonderfully-made women with red hair and angular arms—I first met her. Jack and I were great chums at that time—it was just after I sold out—and I used to paint at his rooms. I was going in for painting just then with a great spurt, having nothing but my brush to live upon. You can guess the rest. As Bessie was a very pretty girl, and neither she nor I had a sixpence wherewith to bless ourselves, of course we fell in love with each other. Poor little thing, how pretty she used to look in those days, standing on Jack's movable platform, with her hair falling loose about her face, and a heap of primroses held up in her petticoat!—such a patient plaintive look in the sweet little mouth, as much as to say, "I'm very tired of standing here; but I'm only a model, to be hired for eighteenpence an hour; go on smoking your cigars, and talking your slangey talk about the turf and the theatres, gentlemen. I count for nothing." Poor little patient soul! she was so helpless and so friendless, Clary. I think my love for her was something

like the compassion one feels for some young feeble bird that has fallen out of its nest. So we were married one morning; and for some time lived in lodgings at Putney, where I used to suffer considerable affliction from Count Ugolino and two bony boys, Bessie's brothers, who looked as if the count had been acting up to his character with too great a fidelity. Ugolino himself would come prowling out of a Saturday afternoon to borrow the wherewithal to pay his week's lodging, lest he should be cast out into the streets at nightfall; and it was a common thing for one of the bony boys to appear at breakfast-time with a duplicate of his father's coat, pledged over-night for drink, and without the means of redeeming which he could not pursue his honourable vocation. In short, I think it was as much the affliction of the Ugolino family as my own entanglements that drove me to seek my fortunes on the other side of the world.'

Austin Lovel opened one of the doors, and called his wife.

'Come here, Bessie; I've a pleasant surprise for you.'

Mrs. Lovel appeared quickly in answer to this summons. She had changed her morning dress for

a purple silk, which was smartly trimmed, but by no means fresh, and she had dressed her hair, and refreshed her complexion by a liberal application of violet powder. She had a look which can only be described as 'flashy'—a look that struck Clarissa unpleasantly, in spite of herself.

Her expressions of surprise did not sound quite so natural as they might have done—for she had been listening at the folding-doors during a considerable part of the interview; but she seemed really delighted by Mrs. Granger's condescension, and she kissed that lady with much affection.

'I'm sure I do feel proud to know any relation of Austin's,' she said, 'and you most of all, who have been so kind to him. Heaven knows what would have become of us last winter, if it hadn't been for your generosity.'

Clarissa laid her hand upon Bessie Lovel's lips.

'You mustn't talk of generosity between my brother and me,' she said; 'all I have in the world is at his service. And now let me see my nephews, please; and then I must run away.'

The nephews were produced; the boy Clarissa had seen, and another of smaller growth—pale-faced, bright-eyed little fellows. They too had been sub-

jected to the infliction of soap-and-water and hair-brushes, clean pinafores, and so on, since Mrs. Granger's arrival.

She knelt down and kissed them both, with real motherly tenderness, thinking of her own darling, and the difference between his fortunes and theirs; and then, after a warm caress, she slipped a napoleon into each little warm hand, 'to buy toys,' and rose to depart.

'I must hurry away now, Austin,' she said; 'but I shall come again very soon, if I may. Good-bye, dear, and God bless you.'

The embrace that followed was a very fervent one. It had been sweet to meet again after so many years, and it was hard to leave him so soon—to leave him with the conviction that his life was a wreck. But Clarissa had no time to linger. The thought of the baby in the Luxembourg-gardens had been distracting her for ever so long. These stolen meetings must needs be short.

She looked at her watch when she got back to the street, and found, to her horror, that she had been very nearly an hour away from the nurse and her charge. The carriage was waiting at the gate, and she had to encounter the full fire of her ser-

vants' gaze as she crossed the road and went into the gardens. Yes, there was the baby's blue-velvet pelisse resplendent at the end of an avenue. Clarissa walked quickly to meet him.

'My darling!' she cried. 'Has he been waiting for his mamma? I hope he has not been tired of the gardens, nurse?'

'Yes, ma'am, he have been tired,' replied Mrs. Brobson, with an outraged air. 'There ain't much in these gardens to keep a baby of his age amused for an hour at a stretch; and in a east wind too! It's right down cutting at that corner.'

'Why didn't you take him home in the carriage, nurse? It would have been better than running any risk of his catching cold.'

'What, and leave you without a conveyance, ma'am? I couldn't have done that!'

'I was detained longer than I expected to stay. O, by the bye, you need not mention to Miss Granger that I have been making a call. The people I have been to see are—are in humble circumstances; and I don't want her to know anything about it.'

'I hope I know my duty, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Brobson stiffly. That hour's parading in the gardens, without any relief from her subordinate, had

soured her temper, and inclined her to look with unfavourable eyes upon the conduct of her mistress. Clarissa felt that she had excited the suspicion of her servant, and that all her future meetings with her brother would involve as much plotting and planning as would serve for the ripening of a political conspiracy.

END OF VOL. II.

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